Shadow orders: clandestine non-state power in the international system

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Part I: Introduction and context

CHAPTER 1 – Introduction

The secret cable dispatched from the American embassy in Kabul to Washington D.C. struck a sombre tone. "Afghanistan's New Ansari hawala [money exchange] network," it reported in October 2009, "is facilitating bribes and other wide-scale illicit cash transfers for corrupt Afghan officials and is providing illicit financial services for narco-traffickers, insurgents, and criminals through an array of front companies in Afghanistan and the United Arab Emirates."[1] The account symbolised a key juncture in the United States' understanding of the sprawling cross-border linkages and complex relations that existed between different non-state actor groups as well as their connections to state actors. The embassy had already complained two months earlier about interventions by then-Afghan President Hamid Karzai that "authorised the release of detainees [...] and allowed dangerous individuals to re-enter the battlefield," whilst also expressing "concern over pre-trial releases and presidential pardons of narco-traffickers."[2] At the same time, American diplomats concluded rather reluctantly that they had no choice but to work with the Afghan elite. This included both Karzai and his brother, Ahmed Wali Karzai (widely referred to through his initials 'AWK'), the head of Kandahar's Provincial council with "a reputation for shady dealings" and "widely understood to be corrupt and a narcotics trafficker."[3] AWK was not everybody's friend, however. In July 2011, he was killed by three pistol rounds fired at close range by a local police commander whom, ironically, he viewed as a close confidant and who may or may not have been working under Taliban instructions.[4]

The dynamics at play in Afghanistan were certainly complex. Here were members of the national government, supported by external backers, enriching themselves on money from the opiate trade all the while fighting cross-border, narco-funded Taliban insurgents with ties to the Pakistani government and a range of other militant groups in the region. An infamous attempt by intelligence personnel to map the web of connections and relationships between these different parties on a single chart did not make things any clearer. "When we understand that slide, we'll have won the war," exclaimed General Stanley McCrystal, then in command of the military effort in the country.[5] Indeed, the political landscape of Afghanistan would have been difficult enough to understand even without the added complexity of external interference by both state and non-state actors as well as fluid alliances between different armed and criminal actors, each with their own agenda. As teams of analysts traced these connections backwards from conflict epicentres in Afghanistan and Iraq to other countries and regions, a complex picture was gradually coming into focus. It was one in which far-reaching social, economic and political networks coalesced, transacted and intersected in pursuit of a plethora of objectives.

Increasingly large network diagrams, when overlaid onto maps, were in fact revealing what looked like an alternative international 'order' – one in which different players could organise themselves in ways which transcended or circumvented state boundaries and agree on a separate set of rules. State actors such as the Afghan political elite dipped in and out this order, but the main protagonists consisted of a wide cast list of clandestine non-state actor groups – criminal, terrorist and insurgent – trading within a global marketplace where ideas, capabilities and services were being exchanged and where an active shadow economy was

[1] *Investigating an Afghan Money Exchange*, October 18, in *2009 Embassy Cable, State's Secret: A Selection from the Cache of Diplomatic Dispatches*, New York Times WikiLeaks Archive, June 19, 2011,
https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/interactive/world/statessecrets.html.
[2] *Karzai Intervenes in Drug Cases*, October 6, 2009 Embassy Cable in *Ibid*.
[3] *2009 Meeting with Ahmad Wali Karzai*, October 3, 2009 Embassy Cable in *Ibid*.
[4] J. Partlow and K. Sieff, *Ahmed Wali Karzai, half-brother of Afghan president, killed by trusted confidant*, Washington Post, July 12, 2011.
[5] E. Bumiller, *We have met the enemy and He Is PowerPoint*, The New York Times, April 26, 2010.

establishing deep roots. These actors had in common the fact that they actively sought to challenge, alter or subsume the status quo. Their business, accordingly, was that of secrecy, dark dealings, subterfuge and deceit – exploiting, outflanking, co-opting or infiltrating exiting formal structures, rewriting the rulebook and forging a whole range of relationships along the way.

At the same time as these revelations were taking place, tectonic shifts were occurring within the international system as the unipolar world frayed at the edges. The tremors of change, light at first, grew in size and regularity as new conflicts and old feuds (re)emerged around the world. With the global hegemon bogged down in expeditionary quagmires in Iraq and Afghanistan, other, rising powers were becoming more emboldened, willing to pursue expansionist geo-political agendas at a time of international flux. Thus, when the Arab Spring triggered unrest across the Middle East and North Africa, plunging Syria and Libya into civil war, foreign actors were quick to interfere, picking sides and seeking to alter balances of power in line with their regional interests. It was not just state actors, however, who were making the most of the moment. In early 2012, a coalition of Jihadi groups and Tuaregs began its sweep through Mali, bolstered by weapons flowing from Libya. A year later, al Qaeda in Iraq changed its name to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), signalling its future intentions and bent on creating "a caliphate stretching from Aleppo in Syria to Diyala in Iraq."[6] It was perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that Russia turned to non-state actors ranging from outlaw motorcycle gangs to hacking groups for assistance in projecting its influence across the Donbass region following its annexation of Crimea in 2014. Indeed, it had become abundantly clear that these participants were a force to be reckoned with, also competing and vying for political and territorial gains as independent agents of influence within an increasingly multipolar international system.

All these developments were certainly not lost on the Iranian-led so-called 'axis of resistance' seeking to erode Israeli and American power in the Middle East.[7] Thus, in June 2023, Iranian leader Ali Khamenei called for a meeting with Palestinian group Hamas in which he called for "greater unity and coordination among resistance groups," whilst hinting at the possibility of a "multi-front war" against Israel, which would amount to a "convergence of arenas."[8] This built on Iranian Republican Guard Corps (IRGC) efforts to increase operational-level synchronisation amongst various non-state militants located in the Palestinian territories, Lebanon, Yemen, Syria and Iraq.[9] The concept would involve harnessing the likes of Hezbollah, Hamas, the Islamic Jihad, Iraqi Shia militias and Yemen's Houthi as part of a coordinated network of (shadow) influence in the region. Moreover, Hezbollah's leader, Hassan Nasrallah, would be given the role of a quasi-diplomatic envoy, mediating as well as liaising between different factions of the axis. Iran's strategic logic essentially amounted to one of semi-deniable 'forward defence' – addressing and deterring perceived threats to its interests beyond its immediate borders by using an array of proxy (and often non-state) actors, whilst at the same time ensuring strategic depth.[10] By the time Hamas launched its bold and highly coordinated terrorist attacks on Israel a decade later in October 2023, the stage appeared to be set for a fundamental challenge to conventional, state-centric paradigms relating to *how*

[6] '*Timeline: The Rise, Spread, and Fall of the Islamic State'*, Wilson Centre, October 28, 2019, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/timeline-the-rise-spread-and-fall-the-islamic-state.
[7] P. Hafezedi, L. Bassam and A. Mohammed, *Insight: Iran's 'Axis of Resistance' against Israel faces trial by fire*, Reuters, November 2023.
[8] H, Azizi, *How Iran and Its Allies Hope to Sava Hamas*, War on the Rocks, November 2023, https://warontherocks.com/2023/11/how-iran-and-its-allies-hope-to-save-hamas/.
[9] R. Zimmt, *The Gaza war raises questions about the future of Iran's Resistance A*xis, Atlantic Council, November 2023, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/iransource/gaza-iran-resistance-axis-hamas-hezbollah-israel/.
[10] H. Azizi and A. von Humboldt, *The Concept of 'Forward Defence': how has the Syrian crisis shaped the evolution of Iran's military Strategy?,* Geneva Centre for Security Policy, Research Project Paper 4, February 2021, pp. 1-31.

and *by whom* power could be wielded within the international system as well as to the notion of state monopoly over the use of force.

Despite all of these developments, the overall emphasis has largely continued to be placed on state actors as the chief architects of change within the international system – the sole players at the table of the chess game of grand strategy. To a large degree, the modern international system established by the victorious allies after World War II provides a resilient framework of political rules supported by a multilateral architecture and enforced by the most powerful nations.[11] For example, when then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton (perhaps incorrectly) declared that "United States does not recognise spheres of influence," it was state actors that she was both referring to and trying to dissuade.[12] Indeed, the traditional Realist principle that states are the ultimate custodians of authority and power at the international level is one that has held its ground for generations.[13] Surely, Realist theorists might argue, Iranian-backed proxy groups remain exactly that: actors who serve as the behest of a state actor. Iran's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hossein Amir-Abdollahian would disagree, arguing that different non-state factions in the region have their own distinct political identity.[14] Moreover, at the time of writing, Houthi attacks against vessels in the strategically important Bab-el-Mandeb strait continue to cause significant disruption to global supply chains passing through the Red Sea and Suez Canal. To be sure, cracks in the state-centric paradigm are increasingly visible, with the theory increasingly having to accommodate political and market forces operating at the sub-state level.[15] This, arguably, requires a recognition of the individual agency of non-state actor groups as well as their role in shaping regional and international politics.

1.1 Focus, argument and structure

This thesis was to a large degree born out of curiosity. After dozens of missions focused on a combination of organised crime, terrorism and insurgencies in different regions around the world, it became increasingly apparent to this researcher that existing policy and strategic thinking did not adequately reflect the full character of these organisations, particularly with respect to the ways in which they interacted and connected across borders. Indeed, the ability of such groups to wield significant power – even, at times, in more developed countries – and engage in complex relationships with both state and non-state actors appeared to constitute more of a rule than an exception.

For this reason, the dissertation adopts a comparative approach to establish whether there are identifiable and consistent patterns in the behaviour and characteristics of different clandestine non-state actors, particularly as these relate to challenging the authority of the state and projecting political power. In so doing, its central argument is that clandestine non-state actors need to be understood as independent, quasi-sovereign agents of political change capable of establishing their own micro spheres of influence, pursuing external, 'foreign' policies and adopting the range of levers of power available to states, albeit typically at a

[11] *Challenges to the Rules-Based International Order*, London Conference Background Paper, Chatham House, The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2015, p. 1.
[12] G. Allison, *The New Spheres of Influence: Sharing the Globe with Other Great Powers*, Foreign Affairs, March-April 2020, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-02-10/new-spheres-influence.
[13] See for example D. Voelsen and L. V. Schettler, *International political authority: on the meaning and scope of justified hierarchy in international relations*, International Relations 2019, Vol. 33(4) pp. 540–562.
[14] N. Bozorgmehr, *Iran told US of its opposition to wider conflict*, Financial Times, November 18, 2023.
[15] See for example M. Ataman, *The Impact of Non-State Actors on World Politics: A challenge to Nation States*, Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations, Vol.2, No.1, Fall 2003, pp. 42-66.

smaller scale. It also argues that technology has increased their ability to connect, trade, and cooperate as effective cross-jurisdictional networks in pursuit of a range of strategic aims resulting in the creation of alternative transnational power systems, or 'micro-orders', running parallel to, often intersecting with, and sometimes altering the 'formal' nation-based international system.

Furthermore, it attempts to highlight the extent to which clandestine organisations draw on a range of independent licit and illicit service providers, whose expertise has become increasingly available in the international marketplace and who have enabled organisations to establish complex and highly effective financial systems effectively amounting to a global shadow economy. Building on this analysis, the thesis underlines the geo-strategic importance of clandestine organisations, including their complex relationship with state actors and their potential contributions to the conduct of sub-threshold warfare and international influence campaigns. Finally, it outlines the risks posed by rigid normative, definitional and institutional boundaries that fail to recognise the adaptive, polymorphic and multi-faceted character of clandestine non-state organisations or the commonalities and interactions that exist between them.

Research question and hypotheses:

The above focus of investigation is centred around a central research question and three accompanying, hypotheses. These were generated via the detailed examination of both existing theory, including relevant literature, and of a wide sample of case studies (the details of which is described in the methodological section of this chapter and further evidenced via the theoretical chapters 3-5).

Research question: To what extent, and in what ways, do different clandestine non-state actors (CNSAs) operating in the international system display recurring approaches and behaviours with respect to challenging the authority of the (sovereign) state, projecting power and pursuing their individual strategic interests?

Hypothesis 1: There is an established body of evidence highlighting the extent to which CNSAs of various denominations display the characteristics of *political* actors. However, the agency of CNSAs extends to articulating and balancing complex policy choices, carving out (local) spheres of influence and securing multi-vector partnerships.[16]

Hypothesis 2: The morphologies and organisational structures of CNSAs are both adaptive and shaped by similar considerations, including the need to mitigate threats (such as disruption by state actors) and a willingness to seize specific political and economic opportunities. At the same time, their structural design is also influenced by their ideology as well as strategic and political culture.

Hypothesis 3: CNSAs consistently apply a variation on the types of levers of power available to states, including with respect to the conduct of warfare; the pursuit of economic and financial interests; and strategic communications.[17]

[16] Multi-vector partnerships refer to developing relations with multiple (and at times competing) entities, actors or powers.

[17] These hypotheses are also built on the assumption that CNSAs differ fundamentally from other non-state organisations such as licit businesses, who do not typically seek to challenge the authority of the state, develop advanced armed capabilities, or face the direct threat of physical disruption measures by the latter.

By investigating the above research question and accompanying hypotheses, **the dissertation seeks to contribute to advancing existing theory and knowledge by filling at least three gaps in the evidence base**. Firstly, it attempts to advance the 'state of the art' by breaking down and looking across traditional academic and definitional boundaries and partitions of nomenclature, comparing organisations of different clandestine denominations (this will be explained in more detail below). Secondly, it proposes a new analytical framework with direct policy value and of particular relevance within the fields of intelligence analysis and national security. Thirdly, it makes the case for the existence of an alternative clandestine international 'order' and accompanying power systems, running parallel to – and often intersecting with – the 'rules-based' international system.

1.2 Navigating definitions

"Keep it tight, but keep it loose" Miles Davis

One of the most significant challenges in producing this dissertation consisted of adopting an analytical approach that allowed for an open as well as inductive means of systemically investigating different types of non-state actor organisations, whilst still applying a degree of differentiation between them. Critical, here, was to avoid the temptation to retrofit emerging findings into static, predefined typologies. At the same time, a comparative study would not be possible without some broad contours and delineations offering, in effect, a chart with which to navigate the analytical and definitional complexity surrounding the object of study. To be sure – and as May Darwich explains – non-state actors of an armed or violent nature constitute a relatively novel area of inquiry in Foreign Policy Analysis.[18] Moreover, and as another set of observers note, "there is no universally accepted definition of non-state actors," partly owing to the fact that these do not neatly fit conventional international relations paradigms that are largely "based on a state-centric world view."[19] To a large extent, and as will be explored in the subsequent chapter, the only real point of consensus is that these actors can be characterised with respect to their position in relation to the state. Beyond this, the way that they are treated as well as defined varies significantly from one academic or professional field to another as well as between legal and normative frameworks, such as with respect to what is considered or defined as 'illicit', as opposed to 'licit', activity. This complexity is perhaps best illustrated through a cross-cutting synthesis of the relevant literature, with a focus on various attempts at definitions.

Existing definitions of organised crime constituted the first port of call of this exploration. Any glimmer of hope that the primary instrument of international law – the United Nations Convention on Transnational Organised Crime (UNTOC) – might offer a workable definition quickly dimmed. Its only attempt at defining the phenomenon was one that describes it as "a structured group of three or more persons, existing for a period of time and acting in concert with the aim of committing one or more serious crimes or offences," with a view to "obtaining […] financial or other material benefit."[20] Theoretically, this could therefore include any manner of petty criminal gangs with limited reach and precious few resources. A subsequent emphasis on activities carrying higher prison sentences (a factor emphasised within the legalistic debate) was insufficient to rescue the definition. Perhaps international law enforcement could succeed where the United Nations had failed. In its 2017 Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment, Europol, the European law enforcement agency, recognised what it considered to be fundamental flaws in UNTOC's definition, noting that the latter "[did not] adequately

[18] M. Darwich, *Foreign Policy Analysis and Armed Non-State Actors in World Politics: Lessons from the Middle East*, Foreign Policy Analysis, Vol.17, Issue 4, October 2021, pp. 1-8.
[19] *Armed Non-State Actors: Current Trends and Future Challenges*, DCAF & Geneva Call, Horizon 2015 Working Paper No. 5, 2015, p.7, https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/144858/ANSA_Final.pdf.
[20] Articles 2(a) and 5(1)(a)(i) of the *United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime*, Adopted by General Assembly resolution 55/25, November 15, 2000.

describe the complex and flexible nature of modern organised crime networks."[21] It followed this critique with a lengthy, somewhat meandering description of the phenomenon which, despite its best efforts, did not amount to a credible alternative.[22] INTERPOL, meanwhile, offers little additional clarity to the debate, suggesting only that organised crime involved "many different types of criminal activities spanning several countries" which, in turn, included "trafficking in people, drugs, illicit goods and weapons, armed robbery, counterfeiting and money laundering."[23] The US Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) similarly describes organised crime groups as "self-perpetuating associations of individuals who operate, wholly or in part, by illegal means and irrespective of geography." [24] Somewhat more convincingly, and perhaps revealing its long legacy of observing criminal syndicates, it also adds that such organisations "constantly seek to obtain power [and] influence" alongside monetary gains."[25] Overall however, all of these definitions convey a tendency to characterise organised crime as what Adam Edwards and Peter Gill describe as a dichotomy between 'upper world' (i.e., those with monopoly over enforcing order) and the 'underworld' (i.e., those standing against it).[26]

The definitional quest continued within the sinuous corridors of the academic literature. Here, the main revelation was the extent to which consensus had not been reached beyond what Matjaz Jager describes as "the dangerousness of the nebulous 'thing' which should, without delay, be struggled against."[27] Letizia Paoli suggests that organised crime amounts to little more than a "fuzzy and contested umbrella concept" and that this has resulted in "broad, lowest-common denominator definitions."[28] Edward Kleemans explains that "the history of organised crime research is not only the history of shifting theoretical perspectives, it is also the history of oscillating empirical phenomena."[29] Klaus von Lampe, one of the foremost thinkers on organised crime, points to a "thin and fragmented" literature amounting to an "eclectic patchwork" in which "the various references to other disciplines have added to the confusion that already existed on the conceptual level."[30] According to von Lampe, moreover, theorists and practitioners have in effect given up on defining organised crime, suggesting that the debate has instead shifted to ways of measuring it.[31] Definitions specific to 'transnational' organised crime, meanwhile, are even more nebulous, spanning from the ventriloquising of domestic definitions to broad brush accounts that coble together activities ranging from drug

[21] *European Union Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment (SOCTA)*, EUROPOL, February 2017, p. 13.
[22] The SOCTA's definition combined and somewhat confused different variables such as activities and structural characteristics. The risks and limitations associated with definitions produced (solely) by law enforcement will be described in more detail in subsequent chapters.
[23] *Organised Crime*, INTERPOL, https://www.interpol.int/en/Crimes/Organized-crime.
[24] *Transnational Organized Crime*, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), https://www.fbi.gov/investigate/organized-crime.
[25] *Ibid.*
[26] A. Edwards and P. Gill (eds.), *Transnational Organised Crime: Perspectives on Global Security*, London, Routledge, 2003, p. 9.
A similar binary definition relationship is described in M. van Dijck, Discussing Definitions of Organised Crime: Word Play in Academic and Political Discourse, HUMSEC Journal, Issue 1, p. 83, http://www.humsec.eu/cms/fileadmin/user_upload/humsec/Journal/van_Dijck_OC_Definitions.pdf.
[27] M. Jager, '*In the quest for essence: The principal-agent-client model of corruption',* in P. C. van Duyne *et al.*, *Threats and Phantoms of Organised Crime, Corruption and Terrorism: Critical European perspectives*, Wolf Legal Publishers, Nijmegen, 2004, p. 228.
[28] L. Paoli (ed.), The Oxford Handbook of Organized Crime, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 2.
[29] E. Kleemans, *'Theoretical perspectives on organized crime'*, in L. Paoli (ed.), p. 32.
[30] M. E. Beare (ed.), *Transnational Organized Crime*, London, Routledge, 2013, p. 79.
[31] K. von Lampe, *'Measuring Organised Crime: A Critique of Current Approaches'*, in P. C. van Duyne *et al.*, p. 85.

trafficking to economic espionage.[32] Michael Woodiwiss, for his part, attributes the concept of transnational organised crime to the 'Americanisation' of international law enforcement as well as to Reagan-era drug control strategies.[33] The term, Woodiwiss argues, also reflects a long-held 'alien conspiracy' position within parts of the American establishment in which organised crime is viewed as an unamerican activity imported by foreign actors such as Italians and Latin Americans.[34]

The next logical line of investigation consisted of (international) terrorism definitions, given that these organisations would also form a central component of this research. Striking here, although perhaps unsurprising to observers, was the lack of a universal definition even within international law.[35] One attempt by the Special Tribunal for Lebanon in 2011 at examining existing customary international law relating to 'transnational' terrorism specifically did point to three components, namely "the perpetration of a criminal act [...]; the intent to spread fear among the population [...] or indirectly coerce a national or international authority to take some action;" and "a transnational element."[36] However, this account remains broad whilst overlapping quite significantly with definitions of organised crime (indeed, a number of criminal groups could be defined along similar lines). There is at least a degree of consensus amongst more scholarly attempts at defining the phenomenon in that these, on the whole, tend to emphasise the use of violence, the propagation of fear and the pursuit of political objectives.[37] Walter Laqueur thus defines terrorism as "the use of violence, a method of combat, or a strategy to achieve certain targets," whilst highlighting the importance of publicity as "an essential factor in the terrorist strategy."[38] Martha Crenshaw speaks of terrorism as a "conspiratorial style of violence" which, in turn, is "calculated to alter the attitudes and behaviour of multiple audiences."[39] Furthermore, whilst a number of definitions attribute acts of terrorism to both state and non-state actors,[40] Bruce Hoffman, one of the most seminal writers on the topic, specifies that these are instead conducted by *organisations* "with an identifiable chain of command or conspiratorial cell structure (whose members wear no uniform or identifying insignia), and perpetrated by a subnational group or non-state entity."[41]

Achieving any degree of clarity on the possible conceptual boundaries that can be drawn around terrorism and organised crime is further complicated when these activities are observed through the lens of modern conflicts. Here, armed non-state actors such as insurgencies, many of whom have cross border connections, frequently employ a combination of guerrilla warfare and terrorist tactics, whilst also engaging in criminal activities and even

[32] See for example P. Dobriansky, *The Explosive Growth of Globalized Crime*, The Information Warfare Site, http://www.iwar.org.uk/ecoespionage/resources/transnational-crime/gj01.htm
[33] M. Woodiwiss, *Organised crime, the mythology of the Mafia, and the American/Anglo Response*, Policy Paper, History and Policy, November 1, 2012, http://www.historyandpolicy.org/policy-papers/papers/organised-crime-the-mythology-of-the-mafia-and-the-american-anglo-response.
[34] P. C. van Duyne *et al.*, p. 3.
[35] The United Nations, for example, has not produced one despite passing a number of terrorism-related resolutions over the years. These include UNSC Resolution 1566 (2004) and General Assembly resolution 49/60. See for example *'Defining Terrorism'*, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, https://www.unodc.org/e4j/en/terrorism/module-4/key-issues/defining-terrorism.html.
[36] M. J. Ventura, *Terrorism According to the STL's Interlocutory Decision on the Applicable Law*, Journal of International Criminal Justice 9, October 2011, pp.1025-1026.
[37] J. Matusitz, *Terrorism and Communication: A Critical Introduction*, Los Angeles, SAGE Publications Inc., 2013, p. 2.
[38] J. S. Tuman, Communicating Terror: The Rhetorical Dimensions of Terrorism, p.9
[39] M. Stohl *et al.* (eds), *Constructions of Terrorism: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Research and Policy*, Oakland, University of California Press, 2017, p. 82.
[40] J.S. Tuman, pp. 9-11.
[41] M. Eid, *Exchanging Terrorism Oxygen for Media Airwaves: The Age of Terroredia,* Hershey (PA), Information Science Reference, 2014, p. 24.

various forms of warlordism.[42] Indeed, Alex Schmid explains that terrorism can both "be viewed within a criminal justice model as a 'very serious crime' [or] within a war model as a special variant of '(guerrilla) warfare'."[43] Perhaps as a result, insurgency-derived terminology is favoured by some commentators seeking more flexibility in describing groups employing a variety of tactics and *modus operandi*. For example, Oscar Palma describes the emergence of 'commercial' insurgencies who, he argues, are guided by criminal interests and operating as transnational networks capable of conducting political, military and criminal activities.[44] Frank Hoffman, meanwhile, points to complex, 'neo-classical' insurgencies shaped by transnational relationships, drawing on globally dispersed diaspora groups, capitalising on the 'information dimension' and characterised by hybrid operating structures.[45] According to Hoffman, the very notion of the insurgent battlespace is becoming increasingly difficult to define as is the task of "defining the nature of the opponent, and assessing his strategy, structure, and means."[46] Commenting on modern wars and their protagonists, David Betz thus argues that these "can only be understood in context, which is to say in the light of the overarching preconceptions, ideals and myths and delusions of their time."[47]

The opaque fog surrounding definitions relating to violent and criminal non-state actors – let alone those involved in transnational activities – calls for a nomenclature that better captures their multifaceted character, whilst also avoiding legalistic traps. The term '*clandestine* non-state actor', in turn, offers significant advantages. For example, Robert Rodes argues that the term offers "greater nuance […] than current legal judgments."[48] It also provides an overarching label that allows the inclusion of multiple actors and activities as long as these demonstrate a propensity to act in a secretive manner and to engage in acts that are not 'officially allowed' (in other words sanctioned by the laws of states in which those activities take place),[49] implying a sense of irregularity. Even here, of course, there are limitations. For example, the propensity for terrorist organisations to publicise their aims, including through high profile acts of violence, does not at first seem to easily fit the classical notion of clandestine activity. However, the fact remains that terrorist groups remain covert in the planning and conduct of their operations, as indeed do cross-border insurgencies and organised crime groups (at least until the point where their territorial or political control is such that secrecy is no longer required). Indeed, such discretion tends to be an existential requirement for the survival of such organisations, protecting them from disruption and dissolution. Thus, Schmid at the very least concedes that terrorism involves "action employed by semi-clandestine [...] actors."[50] Thus, the term can be employed with a degree of flexibility on the basis that discretion, concealment and/or infiltration constitute either central strategic axioms or necessary operational principles for all of the organisations under study.

Nevertheless, as a comparative study of different transnational organisations, this thesis still employs terrorist, insurgent and criminal terminology in order to provide analytical 'start points' as well as descriptive delineations and boundaries between different groups.[51] In doing so,

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[42] See for example A. Giustozzi, *The Debate on Warlordism: The importance of Military Legitimacy*, Crisis States Research Centre, Discussion Paper No.13, London School of Economics, October 2005, p. 5.
[43] A. Schmid, *Terrorism - The Definitional Problem*, Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law, Vol. 36, Issue 2, 2004, p. 384.
[44] O. Palma, *Transnational networks of insurgency and crime: explaining the spread of commercial insurgencies beyond state borders*, Small Wars & Insurgencies, 26:3, March 2015, pp. 476-496.
[45] See F. G. Hoffman, *Neo-Classical Counterinsurgency? Parameters* 37, No. 2, 2007, pp.71-87.
[46] Ibid, p. 75.
[47] D. Betz, *Carnage and Connectivity: Landmarks in the Decline of Conventional Military Power*, London, Hurst & Company, 2015, p. 27.
[48] R. E. Rodes, *On Clandestine Warfare*, Washington and Lee Law Review, Vol.39, 1982, p. 334.
[49] *Clandestine*, Cambridge dictionary definition, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/.
[50] A. Schmid, p. 382.
[51] This approach is described in more detail in the methodological section.

the analysis draws a distinction between, on the one side, terrorist, insurgent and guerrilla organisations whose primary activities gravitate around political change and, on the other, criminal organisations whose activities are primarily of an economic nature (accepting, of course, that these may also support political objectives). This is done in full acknowledgment of the flaws, traps and limitations of such a binary differentiation. In fact, the dissertation's use of existing nomenclature helps to build the case for its subsequent claim that a shift in the terminology is required in order to better reflect the fluid and multifaceted nature of modern non-state actor networks. Finally, any account of the lexicon contained in this thesis would be incomplete without a mention of the various terms and synonyms used to allude to clandestine non-state actor groupings (i.e., networks consisting of multiple individuals connected in the pursuit of specific objectives). Here, and broadly reflecting the literature, the terms 'group', 'organisation' and, to a lesser degree, 'movement' are employed interchangeably for the purposes of stylistic variation.[52]

1.3 Methodological approach

As briefly outlined above, the overall qualitative approach that underpins this thesis consists of three interlocking components. The first amongst these is **a theoretical review exploring the concept of (clandestine) non-state actors, including as this relates to the notion of the sovereign state and political legitimacy**. This same component thus provides broad conceptual parameters and contours within which this thesis' subsequent analysis can be situated, whilst highlighting prevailing concepts and biases within the existing academic literature. The review also provides challenges to established and mainstream concepts as well as normative paradigms, including with respect to the characterisation of clandestine non-state actors.

Secondly, and building on this foundation, the thesis introduces **a qualitative analytical framework inductively drawn from the examination of the relevant (theoretical) literature and a wide sample of case study examples**. This involved an iterative as well as inductive process in which broad categories relating to the characteristics, functions and behaviours of clandestine organisations were identified and extrapolated from existing theory and real-world examples and labelled thematically. This approach also allowed for identified categories to be refined, broken down (e.g., into sub-categories) and/or reorganised as new evidence came to light. Whilst this framework constitutes a key output in and of itself (with value, for example to strategists and intelligence analysts), its primary value to this thesis is that it provides a basis for the subsequent granular analysis of selected case studies, as will be explained in more detail below. Consistent with the age-old principles put forward by Karl Popper, the inductive nature of the investigation also provided a means of 'improving' the analytical framework as new evidence came to light.[53]

In order to develop the analytical framework the research borrowed from *qualitative content analysis*, a method initially developed within the disciplines of social psychology, sociology and anthropology and calibrated towards understanding the intentions, structures and attitudes of different types of organisations and social systems.[54] Indeed, the method permits empirical observation to be conducted both inductively and intuitively in a way that draws on

[52] These terms are also used at different times and by different theorists, departments and agencies to refer to the same clandestine actors.
[53] See also I. Grattan-Guinness, K*arl Popper and the 'The Problem of Induction': A Fresh Look at the Logic of Testing Scientific Theories*, Erkenntnis (1975-), Vol. 60, No. 1, 2004, pp. 107–20.
[54] See V. J. Duriau *et* al., *A Content Analysis of the Content Analysis Literature in Organization Studies: Research Themes, Data Sources, and Methodological Refinements,* Organizational Research Methods volume 10 Number 1, January 2007, pp. 6-16.

a wide range of empirical materials.[55] It also allows for data – such as case study material – to be catalogued under specific fields and categories, including those selected deductively from existing theory. Moreover, the method allows these same categories and associated content to be reordered as part of the analytical process, offering a means of gradually carving out an ontological framework.[56] Finally, and in contrast to traditional typology-based approaches, it tolerates a degree of overlap between different analytical categories on the premise that qualitatively derived content can be assigned simultaneously to more than one analytical category.[57]

This same approach to classifying and organising data is both explained in **Table 1**, below, and further illustrated in **Annex B**, which provides a visual example of the collated and labelled dataset used to develop the framework.

Field	Description
1.Type of finding	This field recorded whether a particular insight was gleaned via the theoretic literature or through real-world case studies.
2. Historical period	This field captured the decade in which a particular occurrence or characteristic either took place or manifested itself.
3. Overall level (or 'class') of finding	This field captured the macro 'levels' within which a particular development or finding could be situated, aggregating to a strategic framework. Through iterative analysis, these were refined to reflect three levels, namely: (clandestine) policy choices and strategic direction; organisational structures; and levers of power.
4. Category of finding	Flowing from the above 'level' field, this specific field consisted of labelling a particular finding or insight by category, such as whether it pertained to a group's strategic logic (under the policy choices field); membership (under the organisational structure level); or use of communication and propaganda (under the levers of power level).
5. Characteristic	This field labeled and recorded more granular or specific traits, attributes and Modus Operandi pertaining to the above categories. For example, characteristics flowing from the communication and propaganda category included the use of online and digital methods of dissemination.
6. Detail	This free-form field allowed the capture of qualitative detail pertaining to identified characteristics, adding further contextual granularity to the analysis.
7. Reference	Sources were captured in order to ensure academic rigour and for the purpose of referencing and citations.

Table 1: *description of the fields used to capture and label data as the basis for developing the thesis' analytical framework.*

[55] Such materials can include personal and historical accounts, interviews, texts and observations. The approach also adheres to the naturalistic paradigm, recognising meaning as both socially constructed and context-dependent – a vantage point that appeared particularly appropriate for a research topic focused on organisational processes and group experiences. See for example H. Hashemnejad, *Qualitative Content Analysis Research*, Journal of ELT and Applied Linguistics, Vol.3, Issue-1, March 2015, p. 56.

[56] See for example H.F. Hsieh S. E. Shannon, *Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis*, Qualitative Health Research, Vol. 15 No. 9, November 2005, pp.1281-1283; and R. Weber, *Basis content analysis (2nd ed.)*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA, 1990 p. 2.

[57] See also R. Tesch, *Qualitative Research: Analysis Types & Software Tools*, Falmer Press, Bristol, PA, 1990; and Y.S. Lincoln and E.G. Guba, Naturalistic Inquiry, Sage Publications, Beverly Hills, CA, 1985 in B. M. Wildemuth (ed.), p. 4; B. Li *et al.*, *Agent Based Modelling on Organizational Dynamics of Terrorist Network*, Discrete Dynamics in Nature and Society, Vol. 2015, November 2015, pp. 1-18; W. Enders and X. Su, *Rational Terrorists and Optimal Network Structure*, The Journal of Conflict Resolution, Vol. 51, No. 1, 2007, pp. 33–57; S. T. Zech and M. Gabbay, *Social Network Analysis in the Study of Terrorism and Insurgency: From Organization to Politics*, International Studies Review, Vol.18, No. 2, March 2016, pp. 1-31; J. Comas *et al.*, *Terrorism as Formal Organization, Network and Social Movement*, Journal of Management Inquiry, Vol. 24, Issue 1, June 2014, pp. 47-60; and P. Campana, *Explaining criminal networks: Strategies and potential pitfalls*, Methodological Innovations, Vol. 9, 2016, pp. 1-10.

Moreover, **Table 2** (below) details the relevance of the analytical framework, including its key levels of analysis, to the investigation's initial hypotheses. Specifically, it shows how this is geared towards examining key aspects of those same hypotheses.

Framework level (class of finding)	Corresponding hypothesis
Policy choices and strategic direction	Hypothesis 1: There is an established body of evidence highlighting the extent to which CNSAs of various denominations display the characteristics of *political* actors. However, the agency of CNSAs extends to articulating and balancing complex policy choices, carving out (local) spheres of influence and securing multi-vector partnerships.
Organisational structure	Hypothesis 2: The morphologies and organisational structures of CNSAs are both adaptive and shaped by similar considerations, including the need to mitigate threats (such as disruption by state actors) and a willingness to seize specific political and economic opportunities. At the same time, their structural design is also influenced by their ideology as well as strategic and political culture.
Levers of power	Hypothesis 3: CNSAs consistently apply a variation on the types of levers of power available to states, including with respect to the conduct of warfare; the pursuit of economic and financial interests; and strategic communications.

***Table 2**: relevance of the analytical framework to the investigation's hypotheses.*

One of the many challenges presented by the object of study consisted of selecting those organisations and groups that could inform the development of a broad analytical framework derived from the aforementioned approach and those that would constitute the focus of a more granular case study investigation aimed at both testing and validating this same framework, ultimately with a view to answering the research question. Identifying the first sample of groups (i.e., those studied in order to inform the development of the analytical framework) involved casting a wide net to cover over thirty clandestine non-state actors spanning across both geographies and historical periods. The full list of these actors is catalogued in **Annex A,** whilst the overall distribution of groups by category is illustrated **in Figure 1**, below.[58] This approach stemmed from the assumption that a larger data sample would help to uncover some of the more enduring forces and cross-cutting characteristics pertaining to these same protagonists. Moreover, and as highlighted above, examining of a wide sample of groups provided a means of further testing and refining insights gleaned from the theoretical literature.

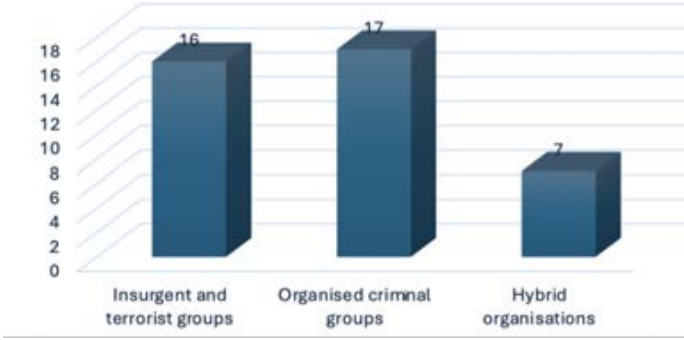

***Figure 1:** Overall distribution of case study groups by category type.*

[58] Further selected historical and contemporary examples were also added to the framework in order to test, refine or add to the analysis, even if these were not catalogued as systematically as the core case-study sample.

Thirdly thus, **the thesis applies the above framework to a much smaller as well as granular sample of case studies**. The objective this time was to narrow the analytical aperture considerably both as a means of validating the framework through detailed empirical as well as comparative analysis and of extrapolating further insights of relevance to the research question. This component of the thesis drew on existing best practices relating to case study analysis, design and research, including the heavily peer-reviewed work of Robert K. Yin.[59] Central to Yin's guidance is ensuring that investigations of contemporary phenomena are situated within a real-world context and that these are approached both rigorously and systematically.[60] He also highlights the value of logic models (which, in the case of this thesis, is provided in the form of the aforementioned analytical framework) as a means of matching empirical observations to theoretically predicted or derived occurrences.[61] Moreover, while this thesis' analytical framework adheres to Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman's advice of identifying, categorising and clustering "chunks of data that go together", the subsequent detailed analytical case study analysis reflects their guidance on working towards "an organized, compressed assembly of information that permits conclusion drawing".[62]

Critically, this same component of research also involved the selection of the more granular case study sample as the basis for comparative investigation. After careful consideration, the decision was taken to examine groups spanning across the clandestine non-state actor spectrum: an organised criminal organisation; an international terrorist organisation; and a guerrilla group or insurgency. Whilst there were a number of case study options available within each of these categories, this researcher settled on the highly transnational 'Ndrangheta branch of the Italian Mafia; al Qaeda, a terrorist organisation whose ideology and *modus operandi* had been emulated by other groups in very different contexts; and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC), a guerrilla movement that also displayed some of the characteristics of a narco-insurgency. The reasons for doing so were threefold. Firstly, all three organisations had a relatively long track-record (at least as far as clandestine organisations go), which allowed for a more accurate analysis of evolutions in their respective strategic 'journeys'. Secondly, the three actors remain, to very different degrees, operational,[63] whilst having also demonstrated the ability to operate effectively across geographical borders. Thirdly, there existed a reasonably large body of reporting, including primary data, pertaining to these groups.

Case study data collection involved trawling through a significant volume of relevant sources and capturing (primarily qualitative) data, using the aforementioned framework as an investigatory handrail. Specifically, the various categories of analysis identified as part of that framework provided a vehicle for searching and organising raw reporting, including as the basis for subsequent synthesis. As per methodological best practice, primary sources were privileged at this stage. These included legal and court case files, testimonies, witness statements, digital, video and social media content[64] and field manuals. Moreover, large troves of declassified primary data – such as the material seized during the United States special forces raid on Osama bin Laden's compound outside Abbottabad, Pakistan – provided invaluable insights into the most inner sanctum of the organisation. Leaked documents, such

[59] R. K. Yin, *Case Study Research Design and Methods (5th ed.)*, Thousand Oaks (CA), Sage Publications, 2015.
[60] *Ibid*, p.16.
[61] *Ibid*, p.155. See also K. M. Eisenhardt, *Building Theories from Case Study Research*, The Academy of Management Review, Vol. 14, No. 4, 1989, pp. 532–50
[62] M. B. Miles and A. M. Huberman, *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (2nd ed.), Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994, p. 11.
[63] As the case study will show, only dissident elements of the FARC continue to operate.
[64] Twitter (now X) and Telegram, for example, revealed themselves to be favourites for violent political groups and insurgencies, whilst Instagram was favoured by (junior) members of some organised crime groups.

as those pertaining to the Mossack Fonseca law firm (the so-called 'Panama Papers')[65] and internal correspondence within the FARC (dubbed 'FARC files'), offered additional insights into decision-making processes.[66] Meanwhile, secondary data included a wide range of historical documents and manuscripts, investigative journalism and press articles, biographical accounts as well as edited volumes, journals and academic literature, all of which are documented in more detail in the bibliography. Wherever possible, careful attention was paid to recognising instances of circular reporting (where multiple sources are based on the same sources) as well as recognising cultural and linguistic biases, such as in the use of terminology. For this reason, this study involved the examination of English, Spanish, French, Arabic and Italian texts and sources.

The next and final stage of the case study analysis process involved data synthesis and the reporting of findings. Here, careful attention was given to capturing group-specific nuance, thus mitigating the risk of generalisation and confirmation bias. Inductive analysis and iteration was also reintroduced at this stage in order to identify patterns within the raw data, particularly as new information came to light. Moreover, the synthesis and reporting phase involved a degree of flexibility and did not therefore attempt to shoehorn data rigidly into framework (sub)categories that were not explicitly relevant to the investigated organisation. This is why chapter case studies outlined in this thesis may place a lesser or greater emphasis on different group characteristics (reflecting, for example, specific expertise or individual capabilities). Such an approach also adhered to the logic of approaching case study analysis as "an empirical enquiry that investigated a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context."[67] In order to retain coherence, clarity and readability, the reporting of findings contained in the case study chapters follows a consistent structure in which key themes are first described and then supported by way of empirical evidence. The systematic approach and reporting structure described above also allowed for observation of consistent patterns and insights *across* case studies, which are captured in the thesis' conclusion.

The interlocking nature of this thesis' approach to the object of study is illustrated in **Figure 2**, below. This shows how the different components described above build on each other as part of a structured as well as systematic investigation.

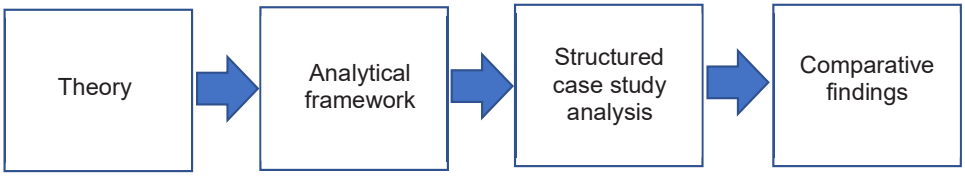

Figure 2: *Methodological components of the research.*

Methodological limitations:

Perhaps inevitably given the object of study, this researcher encountered a number of methodological hurdles calling for difficult choices during the course of the analysis. Some of these related to the usual complexity of distilling robust findings from qualitative research, whilst others were slightly more specific to the object of study. Thus, the first challenge consisted of whether to opt for breadth or depth with respect to case study analysis. A wide case study sample had the advantage of reflecting a larger number of groups, thus increasing

[65] The so-called Panama Papers were the result of the leak of 11.5 million files from the database of Mossack Fonseca, the world's fourth largest offshore law firm.
[66] Government-leaked documents were used selectively where it was deemed that their incorporation did not, when combined with other sources, reveal sensitive state-owned capabilities or methods.
[67] R. Yin, p. 13.

the empirical weight of observations. At the same time, such an approach ran the risk of diluting findings by capturing primarily general patterns, rather than underlying characteristics, motivations and behaviours. This is why the investigation settled on the dual approach of first drawing on a wider case study sample as part of the analytical framework development process (breadth) before applying this same framework on a much smaller comparative sample (depth). The second challenge pertained to data collection, including the difficulty of accessing groups directly and/or conducting on-the-ground fieldwork as well as interviews with members of the investigated groups. This was considered, but ultimately not pursued, because of the safety considerations involved in contacting and engaging directly with clandestine organisations.[68] Returning to Popper, a further critique of the approach could be that the sample of detailed case studies – in effect three organisations that have at different times and in different ways shown themselves as being adept at projecting power – had a higher likelihood of being able to confirm the thesis' hypotheses. Here again, the researcher endeavoured to establish analytical safeguards, including by actively seeking to test whether the analytical framework (which reflected the examination of a much larger sample of organisations) could in fact be applied beyond the three case studies. The thesis' conclusion also highlights where there were observed disparities and differences between the case study actors.

Thesis structure:

This thesis is organised into four interlocking parts. Part I provides a conceptual **overview of clandestine non-state actors**, exploring their determinant characteristic – namely their position in relation to the state. Specifically, Chapter 2 examines the centrality of the (sovereign) state as the main paradigm used to explain the international system, whilst introducing an alternative theoretical lens through which to conceptualise non-state political mobilisation and power projection. Part II then introduces **a framework for structured comparative analysis of clandestine organisations**, drawing both on existing theory and case study examples from around the world as a bridge between conceptual and empirical analysis and as a means of answering the research question. In line with this same research question, the framework deconstructs and outlines the main, recurrently observable components of clandestine non-state actors, namely: their ability to formulate policy choices (Chapter 3); structural patterns in their organisational design (Chapter 4); and their consistent and repeated use of specific levers and instruments of power in pursuit of their strategic objectives (Chapter 5). In Part III, **the framework is subsequently applied to three more granular case study investigations** – the Italian 'Ndrangheta (Chapter 6), al Qaeda 'core' (Chapter 7) and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Chapter 8). Finally, in Part IV, **key findings of the comparative analysis and their applicability to the research question and hypotheses are outlined in the thesis' conclusion** (Chapter 9), the latter of which also highlights considerations relating to the evolving role of clandestine non-state actors within the international system.

[68] This researcher has nevertheless had direct access to clandestine organisations within a professional capacity, which has also helped to guide the research, albeit indirectly.

CHAPTER 2 – Clandestine non-state actors and the state

Having introduced the notion of clandestine non-state actor groups in the previous chapter, it is now appropriate to examine the determinant characteristic of these same actors, namely their position in relation to the state. As Norma Rossi explains, one cannot investigate these actors "in isolation or outside of their relation with their licit counterparts (i.e., states)," because "it is precisely this duel between violent [or] illicit actors and the licit other that is constructive of their identities."[69] Indeed, clandestine non-state actors differ from other influential non-state actors such as multinational corporations or large non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in that they dispute (or, at the very least, actively encroach on) the state's authority and functions, either as their *raison d'être*, or as a means of reaching their strategic objectives. Their choice of clandestine *modus operandi* therefore flows directly from their position as political or economic actors involved in a competitive, adversarial or co-optive relationship with the state as well as their lack of formal recognition by the latter. It follows that these actors can only really be conceptualised when situated against state-centric paradigms as well as notions of sovereignty and legitimate authority. Certainly, much of the literature describing different types of non-state groups tends to use the concept of the state as a benchmark for both explaining – and assessing the legitimacy of – clandestine non-state actors. For this reason, any attempt at situating these actors within the international system must similarly start with an understanding of the dominant theoretical lens through which these actors are viewed. This chapter therefore starts by briefly exposing the concept of the sovereign state as the guiding principle used to describe the international order and those participating within it. It then offers a challenge to that same paradigm, introducing an alternative theoretical lens through which to conceptualise political mobilisation and the pursuit of power.

2.1 Non-state actors, sovereignty and the state

Although the International Relations scholars have often (and arguably erroneously) pointed to the role of the 1648 Peace of Westphalia, which followed the Thirty Years' War, in enshrining the notion of territorial sovereignty and state coexistence within an international order, the idea holds deeper roots.[70] Indeed, the concept of sovereignty, to no small degree, stemmed from an acceptance amongst influential Renaissance era theorists of the role of royal power and the state's authority, with philosophers and jurists such as Jean Bodin (1530-1596) emphasising the king's supreme internal authority as well as external autonomy.[71] In many respects, the idea of internal order and stability being the prerogative of a sovereign ruler continued the line of tradition of Medieval Christian jurisprudence, with the likes of Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) arguing that war could only be waged with the consent of a relevant authority such as a prince, and not by "private persons."[72] Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), who had witnessed the English Civil War, further contributed to the evolution of the concept, famously arguing in *Leviathan* (1651) that man existed in a 'natural' state of anarchy and concluding that the maintenance of order – and, accordingly, peace – was contingent upon an overarching power's ability to keep individuals in check (or 'awe').[73] Writing around

[69] N. Rossi, *Breaking the nexus: conceptualising 'illicit sovereigns': A study of the relation between the Sicilian Mafia and Italian State*, in H. Carrapico, D. Irrera and B. Tupman (eds.), *Criminals and Terrorists in Partnership: Unholy Alliance*, Routledge, Abingdon: Routledge, 2016, pp. 299-319.
[70] See for example A. Osiander, *Sovereignty, International Relations, and the Westphalian Myth*, International Organization, Vol. 55, Issue 2, Spring 2001, pp. 251-287.
[71] See for example S. Holmes, *Jean Bodin: The Paradox of Sovereignty and the Privatization of Religion*, Nomos, Vol. 30, 1988, pp. 5-45; and J. E. Thompson, *State Sovereignty in International Relations: Bridging the Gap between Theory and Empirical Research*, International Studies Quarterly Vol. 39, No. 2, June 1995, pp. 213-233.
[72] Aquinas also stressed the importance of both 'just cause' and 'right intention' in the conduct of war. See for example G. M. Reichberg, *Thomas Aquinas on War and Peace*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.
[73] Individuals were therefore required to subordinate themselves to that same power.

the same time as Hobbes, the Dutch jurist, philosopher and natural law theorist Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) questioned the "absolute right to rebellion," whilst rejecting the idea that it was "permissible for the people to restrain and punish kings whenever they made a bad use of their power."[74]

Thus emerged a strong normative and legal precedent for viewing sovereign states and their kings as the only the legitimate authorities and, accordingly, as the principal architects of the international system.[75] The king's synonymous relationship with sovereignty would later lead Michel Foucault to argue that even in modern times, "the representation of power remains under the spell of the [sovereign] monarchy."[76] Admittedly, the absolute power and rights of the sovereign (and, therefore, state) had been questioned by influential Enlightenment thinkers such as John Locke (1632-1704) who advocated for a social contract between individuals and the sovereign that kept the latter accountable for violations of individual natural rights.[77] Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) subsequently introduced the idea of 'limited sovereignty' in which the actions of the state and political institutions ought to reflect the general will.[78] However, this debate focused on the relationship between individuals and the state, rather than querying the latter's existence. Inevitably, perhaps, sovereignty thus remained the central axiom guiding the emergence of the modern nation state in the 19th century.[79]

Writing in the early 20th century, Max Weber added to both the traditional notion of royal sovereignty and the Marxist paradigm of power stemming from control over the means of production by defining the state as a "human community that successfully claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory."[80] The modern state, according to Weber, differed from feudalism (where lords and vassals retained the ability to exercise power) to the extent that it appropriated the functions of political organisation, including violence, and established the legitimacy of its rule.[81] Thus, Webber argued, any other actor wishing to wield violence would need to be licensed or controlled by states.[82] Writing in the early years of the Weimar Republic, Carl Schmitt resurrected Hobbes' line of argument by positing that the functioning legal order fundamentally depended on sovereign authority with the power to interpret and apply rules and legislation to individual cases.[83] The characteristics

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[74] *'Hugo Grotius*', Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, December 16, 2005, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/grotius/#NatuLaw.

[75] Given its European origins, the modern state also tended to assume the characteristics of 'nations' (or, indeed, nation states) characterised by relative homogeneity as well as collective consciousness and identify to the point that, as David McCrone observes, "the 'nation' is usually a synonym for the state." See D. McCrone, *The Sociology of Nationalism*, New York: Routledge, 1998, p.7.

[76] J. Spieker, *Foucault and Hobbes on Politics, Security, and War*, Alternatives: Global, Local, Political, Vol. 36, No.3, Sage Publications, August 2011, pp. 187-199.

[77] Also of relevance is John Locke's additional argument that revolt against the political authority may be justified if the latter fails to protect those same rights (more specifically, the right to life, liberty and property).

[78] See for example P. J. Kain, *Rousseau, the General Will, and Individual Liberty*, History of Philosophy Quarterly, Vol. 7, No. 3, June 1990, pp. 315-334.

[79] S. Besson, *Sovereignty,* Max Planck Encyclopaedias of International Law, Oxford Public International Law, April 2011, https://opil.ouplaw.com/view/10.1093/law:epil/9780199231690/law-9780199231690-e1472.

[80] M. Weber, *Politics as a vocation*, in H. H Gerth and C. W. Mills (eds), *From Max Weber: essays in sociology*, New York City (NY): Oxford University Press, 1948, p.78.

[81] A. Munro, *State Monopoly on Violence, Political Science and Sociology*, Britannica, https://www.britannica.com/topic/state-monopoly-on-violence.

[82] J. Torpey, *Coming and Going: On the State Monopolization of the Legitimate "Means of Movement"*, *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 16, No. 3, 1998, p. 239.

[83] C. Schmitt, *Political Theology (Translated by G. Schwab),* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985. See also D. Dyzenhaus, *Legality and Legitimacy. Carl Schmitt, Hans Kelsen and Hermann Heller in Weimar*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 35-101.

of sovereignty were further examined by more contemporary thinkers. Building on Webber's notion of monopoly over power, Charles Tilly famously opined that "war made the state, and the state made war,"[84] adding that "preparation for war created the internal structures of the states within it."[85] According to Michael Mann, such a monopoly was at heart of the "autonomous power" of the state and the application of military force both domestically and internationally.[86]

Both Weber's and Mann's respective accounts of (sovereign) state power extended beyond the monopoly over force. Weber, for example, highlighted professionalisation, including via modern bureaucracies, as a central function of state power, whilst Mann pointed to the 'infrastructural' power of the state connected to its "institutional capability to exercise control and implement policy choices within the territory it claims to govern."[87] Mann further dissected state administration as constituting "a division of labour between the state's main institutions, which is coordinated centrally," as well as control over "coinage, and weights and measures, allowing commodities to be exchanged under an ultimate guarantee of value by the state."[88] Adopting a similar line of reasoning, Anthony Giddens underscored the ability to raise taxes (including on wealth generated by industrial production) and a recognition of a state's borders by other states as the key characteristics of the modern sovereign nation state construct.[89] In a similar vein to Mann, he also stressed that its power was derived from "a set of institutional forms of governance maintaining administrative monopoly over a territory, its rule being sanctioned by law."[90] Summing up these converging arguments, Michael Fowler and Julie Bunk conclude that "all sovereign states, it might be observed, have territory, people and a government," even while conceding that "cogent standards do not seem to exist either in law or in practice for the dimensions, number of people, or form of government that might be required of a sovereign state."[91]

However, this relative lack of definitional clarity or consensus around the specific functions of the sovereign state has not diminished its position as the fundamental concept underpinning international law, alongside notions of statehood and territorial jurisdiction. It was perhaps inevitable, therefore, that the United Nations was conceived in 1945 as a state-based system emphasising sovereign equality and supreme authority within states' own territory. Similarly, the state-centric paradigm was extended to the realm of warfare, which was predominantly viewed as the prerogative of governments and their professional militaries.[92] Bruce Kapferer explains that "the very institution of the state is widely conceived of as inseparable from war" to the extent that peace occurs within its borders and that "this very peace may be the condition for its potential for war with those other states and social formations outside of it."[93] The central Clausewitzian axiom that war constitutes a continuation of politics (or, indeed, policy) by other means may also have resulted in the widely held assumption that these same policies

[84] C. Tilly, *Reflections on the History of European State Making*, in C. Tilly (ed.), *The Formation of National States in Western Europe*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975, p. 42.
[85] C. Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 900–1992*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1990, p.76.
[86] M. Mann, *The Autonomous Power of the State: Its Origins, Mechanisms and Results*, European Journal of Sociology, Vol. 25, No. 2, 1984, pp. 185–213.
[87] H. Soifer and M. vom Hau, *Unpacking the Strength of the State: The Utility of State Infrastructural Power*, Studies in Comparative International Development, Vol. 43, No.3, December 2008, p.220.
[88] M. Mann, p.193.
[89] A. Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990, pp.72-73
[90] A. Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence,* London: Routledge, 1985, p. 21.
[91] M. R. Fowler and J. M. Bunck, *What Constitutes the Sovereign State?*, Review of International Studies, Vol. 22, No. 4 , October 1996, p. 381.
[92] Throughout history, this was at times referred to as the Royal Prerogative. See for example '*The Royal War Prerogative: an executive function'*, United Kingdom Parliament, https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmpubadm/1891/189105.htm.
[93] B. Kapferer, *State, Sovereignty, War, and Civil Violence in Emerging Global Realities,* Social Analysis, Vol. 48, Issue 1, Spring 2004, p.64

advanced through warfare were those of states.[94] Perhaps inevitably, the state-centric paradigm *de facto* amounted to placing non-state actors seeking political gains through armed means in a conceptually inferior position, with such approaches being considered illegitimate based on both normative values and legal definitions of legitimate rule and authority.[95]

The West's dominant role in reinforcing the sovereign state paradigm continues to be felt within the contemporary discipline of International Relations where the state constitutes the primary unit of analysis for explaining the dynamics at play within the international system. Here, state-wielded power is viewed as the driving force shaping the global order. The classical Realist Hans Morgenthau, perhaps the most influential twentieth century International Relations thinker, thus argued that international affairs were fundamentally a product of states pursuing their own national interests.[96] Neo (or structural) Realists such as Kenneth Waltz and Hedley Bull expanded on the notion by pointing to the ways in which state interactions were shaped by the anarchic structure of international society.[97] Whilst constructivists of the likes of Ted Hopf provide some helpful nuance, arguing that anarchy is both a subjective concept and one that can be perceived as an "imagined community",[98] such arguments are primarily used to describe variations between states (such as in their perceptions of, or approach to, arms control or trade), rather than giving a wider cast of actors a role on the international stage.[99] Even the Realists' traditional opponent – Liberals – use state-based nomenclature when making their case for the importance of cooperation, norms, and strong institutions as the means towards achieving shared prosperity. The underpinning rational for this trend is captured rather well by David Lake who argues that state-centric International Relations theories are those that are assumed "to best explain the patterns and trends of world politics, including when violence is more or less likely, when economic interdependence will rise or fall...[and] critical problems of international relations effectively and parsimoniously."[100]

2.2 Challenges to the state-centric paradigm

The legalistic notion of sovereignty that was crafted in Europe has never been a universally accepted one, however. Even at the height of the European colonial era, alternative political dynamics and constructs were at play elsewhere in the world. Matthew Erie, for example, describes how China was confused by the behaviour and demands of the British at the time of the mid-19th century Opium Wars.[101] Here, China's Qing empire considered itself the cultural centre of the known world and viewed order as being established through the 'suasion of the emperor', rather than as a product of international laws, external sovereign claims and projections of force. The British, conversely, did not consider the Qing dynasty a sovereign

[94] Clausewitz did recognise the utility of non-state actors in the conduct of war, but more as instruments of state-led military campaigns.
[95] Similarly, state-free political communities (so-called 'ungoverned' spaces) are still generally perceived as a failure of statecraft.
[96] See H. J. Morgenthau, Politics *Among Nations*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1954. H. Milner, *The Assumption of Anarchy in International Relations Theory: A Critique*, Review of International Studies, Vol. 17, No. 1, 1991, pp. 67–85.
[97] A. Watson, *Hedley Bull, States Systems and International Societies*, Review of International Studies, Vol. 13, No. 2, April 1987, pp. 147–153. R. Jervis, *Realism in the Study of World Politics*, International Organization, Vol. 52, No. 4, 1998, pp. 971–991.
[98] T. Hopf, *The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory*, International Security, Vol. 23, No. 1, 1998, p.174.
[99] M. Dornan, *Realist and Constructivist Approaches to Anarchy*, E-International Relations, August 2011, p.2, https://www.e-ir.info/2011/08/29/realist-and-constructivist-approaches-to-anarchy/.
[100] D. A. Lake, *The State in International Relations*, in C. Reus-Smit and D. Snidal (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, p.56.
[101] M. Erie, *Sovereignty, Internationalism, and the Chinese In-Between*, East-West Centre Working Papers No.2, February 2004, pp.10-11.

state, subsequently establishing extraterritorial rights in China.[102] In most of the Islamic world, meanwhile, the concept of 'rule' often flowed from divine, rather than human-constructed notions of sovereignty,[103] whilst the Ottoman Empire resembled more of a blend of different traditions and influences, evolving through reforms to acquire characteristics of the western 'state' despite power remaining in the hands of the Sultan.[104] There are, in turn, at least two considerations that flow from this historical context. The first of these is that even at the state level, alternative traditions and notions of what constitutes statehood and sovereignty are conceivable. The second is that the concepts of 'rule' and 'power' extend far beyond the realm of the (western-defined) sovereign state. It therefore follows that these same dynamics should, at least theoretically, equally apply to levels of political organisation situated *below* that of the 'state'.[105]

Certainly, clandestine non-state actors of all denominations would argue that they are equally – if not more – capable of ruling than the government of the day, emphasising their direct connections to local territories and contrasting their own position with that of the state. Their narratives and manifestos often centre on alternative notions of 'true' legitimacy secured via the consent of local constituencies and shaped by their ability to step in where the state is failing to provide essential functions and basic services. Such groups would fundamentally question the idea that territory can only be governed by central or even devolved state institutions, pointing to the many contexts around the world in which non-state groups are in *de facto* control of large swathes of territory. Thus, by the end of World War I, armed non-sate actor groups were sprawled out across former German, Habsburg, Russian and Ottoman imperial domains to the extent that, as Ariel Ahram, explains, "communist forces had taken over Bavaria and were rising in other German cities [...] even as Weber lectured in Munich in 1919."[106] At the time of writing, examples of such localised forms of governance and control span across continents in contexts such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Burma, Syria, Iraq, Libya, Mali, Venezuela, Yemen and Somalia (to name just a few). Such claims, moreover, do not rest solely with violent insurgencies operating in war-torn countries. Organised criminal groups have also often asserted claims of legitimacy, including via the provision of sought-after goods and services that could not otherwise be acquired by the local populace. Admittedly, criminal groups do perhaps differ in-so-far as they may well seek to pursue power and rule through co-option and infiltration, rather than the removal of formal state architectures, but this essentially amounts to a difference in tactics rather than strategy. Moreover, their defining feature – involvement in criminal activities – is one that is positioned entirely around the notion of breaking or deviating from state-formulated (and therefore 'sovereign') laws.[107]

Similar arguments can also be found within the theoretical debate. William Reno's concept of 'shadow states' describes the erosion of the traditional nation state in favour of clandestine economies, protection rackets and freelancing politicians "who have jettisoned the pretences of seeking legitimacy."[108] Discussing the rise of organised crime-corruption networks, Phil Williams similarly posits that organised crime–corruption networks can be understood

[102] The notion of political autonomy for the non-Chinese therefore constituted an alien concept for the country. The experience would be seminal over the course of the next decades in both fomenting Chinese nationalism and shaping its views on self-determination.
[103] A notion exemplified in its purest form through the traditional notion of the Caliph.
[104] See for example M. Sariyannis, *Ruler and state, state and society in Ottoman political thought*, Turkish Historical Review 4, January 2013, pp. 83-117.
[105] This argument would perhaps also support Aristotle's original claim that man is by nature a 'political animal'.
[106] A. I. Ahram, *Armed Non-State Actors and the Challenge of 21st-Century State Building*, Georgetown Journal of International Affairs, Vol. 20, Fall 2019, p.35.
[107] See for example J. L. Albini and J. S. McIlwain, *Deconstructing Organized Crime: A Historical and Theoretical Study*, London. McFarland & Company Inc., 2012, p. 12.
[108] W. Reno, *Clandestine Economies, Violence and States in Africa*, Journal of International Affairs, Vol. 53, No. 2, Spring 2000, p. 437.

conceptually as the "virus of the modern state, circumventing and breaking down [its] natural defences."[109] Taking and ethnographic viewpoint, Carolyn Nordstrom builds on this idea through the notion of 'shadow networks', which "comprise a significant section of the world's economy, and thus of the world's power grids."[110] Diane Davis goes further, discussing the idea of 'spatialities' of irregular actors characterised by "alternative networks of coercion, allegiance, and reciprocity that challenge old forms and scales of sovereignty" as well as patterns of "power, authority, independence and self-governance unfolding on a variety of territorial scales both smaller and larger than the nation state." [111] Reflecting on the rise of both transnational terrorist and criminal organisations and adopting a somewhat dystopian view, Hilary Matfess and Michael Miklaucic argue that "illicit [non-state] networked organisations are challenging the fundamental principles of sovereignty that undergird the international system."[112] This cumulative line of argument is brought to its logical conclusion by Dimitrios Katsikas who posits that the "world is witnessing an array of governance functions taking place away from the territorial cradle of political authority [that is] the nation state."[113] As a result, Katsikas adds, "non-state actors are increasingly assuming an active part in the design and construction of the international framework of global governance."[114] Ahram agrees, noting that relationships with and between clandestine non-states actors "are not contrary to political order; rather, they are fundamentally constitutive of that order."[115]

Interestingly, in some of his later work, Charles Tilly concedes that violence is not so much a function of the nation state but instead exists along a continuum that also includes banditry, piracy, organised crime and gang rivalry.[116] Expanding the argument, André Bossard argues that the phenomenon of organised crime is "as much political as legal," whilst taking advantage of "all forms of progress, especially in international transport [...] telecommunications and computers."[117] Manuel Castells similarly highlights the extent to which "global crime, the networking of powerful organisations, and their associates, in shared activities throughout the planet, [...] profoundly affects international economies, politics, societies, security, and, ultimately, societies at large."[118] This reflects earlier writings, such as those of Emile Durkheim who, in *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893), offered a sociological addition to this paradigm by theorising that criminal activities could destabilise established social orders by demonstrating a departure from established norms and conventions.[119] In a similar vein, Susan Strange emphasises organised crime's established presence in world markets as well as the displacement of power by "private enterprise in finance, industry and trade" which, in

[109] P. Williams, *Transnational Organized Crime and the State*, in R. B. Hall and T. J. Bierstecker (eds.), *The Emergence of Private Authority in Global Governance*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p.170.
[110] C. Nordstrom, *Shadows and Sovereigns*, Theory, Culture and Society, SAGE, Vol. 17, No. 4, August 2000, p. 38.
[111] D. E. Davis, *Irregular Armed Forces, Shifting Patterns of Commitment, and Fragmented Sovereignty in the Developing World*, Theory and Society, Vol. 39, No. 3/4, May 2010, p.397.
[112] H. Matfess and M. Miklaucic (eds.), *Beyond Convergence: World Without Order*, Centre for Complex Operations, Institute for National Strategic Studies, October 2016, p. ix.
[113] D. Katsikas, *Non-state authority and global governance*, Review of International Studies, Cambridge University Press, Vol. 36, pp. 112-113.
[114] Ibid.
[115] A. I. Ahram, p. 35.
[116] C. Tilly, *War Making and State Making as Organized Crime*, in P. Evans *et al.* (eds), *Bringing the state Back*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, p. 170.
[117] *Ibid*, p. 5.
[118] M. Castells, *End of Millennium*, London: Blackwell, 1996, p.166.
[119] See A. Policante, *Hostis Humani Generis: Pirates and Empires from Antiquity until Today*, Goldsmiths College, December 2012, p.164.

turn, “are now more powerful than the state to whom ultimate political authority over society and economy is supposed to belong.”[120]

Criticisms of both the traditional notion and consequences of sovereignty have not been limited to solely clandestine actors. For example, Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye argued that transnational non-state actors could have interests that ran counter to those of their ‘host’ countries and that played an important role in the international system by facilitating the movement of money, people and information across borders.[121] Samuel Huntington, whose ‘clash of civilisations’ theory would later gain significant traction, posited in the early nineteen seventies that transnational (non-state) organisations were those that conducted operations in two or more countries, optimised their strategies to penetrate specific territories and demonstrated a tendency towards performing specialised functions such as investing money or, critically, conducting hostile activity.[122] Two decades later, James Rosenau took the idea further, suggesting that international relations conducted by governments had in some instances been supplemented by interactions between private individuals and groups.[123] Describing the broader cast list of post-Cold War non-state actor groups, Tadashi Yamamoto opined that modern, instantaneous communications had “weakened the comparative advantage that diplomats and foreign policy bureaucrats used to enjoy.”[124] Writing in the early two thousands, Ronnie Lipschutz, added that “the growth of transnational forces and processes [had] rendered the nation state increasingly permeable to all kinds of flows, ideas and behaviours” leading to “political fragmentation and atomism within states” and “establishing new modes of ‘citizenship’ within and among these new international forms.”[125]

Even Realist paradigms, it might be argued, can be reframed to account for non-state forms of political organisation. Take Morgenthau’s first principle, namely that “politics, like society in general, is governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature.”[126] Here, Morgenthau builds on Nietzsche’s claim that there is “a will to power wherever there is life” and that therefore, man’s quest for power lies at the centre of international relations.[127] In building his argument, Morgenthau thus jumps straight from the individual level to the state level based on the assumption that this constitutes “the unit which carries out its impulses at the international stage.”[128] This however ignores the possibility that the fundamental forces driving state behaviours could also manifest themselves at the *meso* level and be applied to sub-state forms of political organisation that exist *between* the individual and state levels and in which, therefore, groups might also be capable of pursuing external (or indeed

[120] S. Strong, *The Retreat of the State: The Diffusions of Power in the World Economy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,1996, p. 4.
[121] *Ibid*, p. 4.
[122] Huntington also developed a useful typology of twelve organisations. These were public and private; national and international; profit-making and charitable; civil and military; religious and secular; and benign and nefarious. He argued that whilst these organisations may, at first glance, have little in common, they all in fact had a centrally directed bureaucracy. See S. Huntington, *Transnational Organisations in World Politics*, World Politics, Vol. 25, No. 3, April 1973, pp. 332-368.
[123] J. N. Rosenau, *Along the Domestic-Foreign Frontier: Exploring Governance in a Turbulent World*, Cambridge University Press, New York, NY, 1997.
[124] T. Yamamoto, *The Growing Role of Non-State Actors in International Affairs*, Japan Center for International Exchange, 1995, p. 45.
[125] R. Lipschutz, *Members Only? Citizenship and Civic Value in a Time of Globalisation*, in D. N. Nelson and L. Neak (eds.), *Global Society in Transition*, New York, Kluwer Law International, 2002, p.137.
[126] H. J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, Fifth Edition, (Revised), New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978, pp. 4-15.
[127] See G. W. Cunningham, *On Nietzsche's Doctrine of the Will to Power*, The Philosophical Review, Vol. 28, No. 5, September 1919, pp. 479-490.
[128] A. H. Pashakhanlou, *Comparing and Contrasting Classical Realism and Neo-Realism*, E-International Relations, July 2009, https://www.e-ir.info/2009/07/23/comparing-and-contrasting-classical-realism-and-neo-realism.

'international') interests. Mann thus admits that "the state is nothing in itself: it is merely the embodiment of physical force in society"[129] and that "the varied techniques of power [...], military, economic and ideological [...] are characteristic of all social relationships."[130] Instead, these simply reflect "the growth of human beings' increasing capacities for collective social mobilisation of resources."[131] In other words, if the pursuit of power and social organisation are inherent to human nature, these should theoretically be observable within *all* political contexts, regardless of the level of analysis.[132]

Similarly, Neorealist accounts centred around the notions of anarchy could arguably be extended to the sub-state level in-so-far as non-state actors often thrive within anarchic systems, establishing forms of localised governance and order within these same contexts. Kenneth Waltz's own proposed yardstick for measuring power – a combination of "size of population and territory, resource endowment, economic capability, military strength, political stability and competence" – might equally be applied to areas ruled by non-state actor originations (the latter of whom have proved capable of erecting their own systems of governance).[133] Perhaps for this reason, Waltz himself was forced to concede that "states are not and never have been the only international actors."[134] Thus, some theorists have been attracted to the notion of neo-medievalism in which the dynamics of the international system are compared to those of high medieval Europe when neither the church nor states exercised full sovereign control over territory. In such a construct, political authority is exercised by a web of overlapping social entities and non-territorial agents of different denominations – city states, non-state enclaves, principalities, and religious entities.[135]

Meanwhile, the Constructivist school of International Relations theory, forged out of seminal works such as Nicholas Onuf's *World of Our Making* (1989),[136] Friedrich Kratochwill's *Rules, Norms and Decisions* (1989),[137] and Alexander Wendt's *Social Theory of International Politics* (1999), depicts an international system that is socially constructed and therefore rooted in shared ideas, norms and identities.[138] This conceptualisation of state interests as being a product of social interaction and consciousness allows a wider set of cultural influences and actors to play a role in shaping the worldviews that underpin global politics. In theory, Constructivism therefore opens a window for non-state actors – including, in this case, violent or criminal organisations – to contribute to forging the attitudes exhibited on the world stage. However, despite its more flexible ontology and although helpful in accounting for a gamut of factors and protagonists, the theory retains the state as its primary unit of analysis without fully testing how its core assumptions might be applied to 'lower' political orders.[139]

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[129] M. Mann, p. 186.
[130] Ibid, p. 193.
[131] Ibid.
[132] Perhaps for this reason, Nicolas Onuf questions the validity of the similarly state-centric Just War theory tradition, suggesting that it "unduly simplifies the complex relations of authority in today's world." See V. Morkevicius, Review: *Re-Thinking Legitimate Authority: Incorporating Nonstate Actors into the Just War Framework*, International Studies Review, Vol. 16, No. 1, March 2014, pp. 158.
[133] K. N. Waltz, *The Emerging Structure of International Politics*, International Security, Vol. 18, No. 2, Fall 1993, p. 50.
[134] K. N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1979, pp. 93-94.
[135] J. Friedrichs, *The Meaning of New Medievalism*, European Journal of International Relations. Vol.7, Issue 4, Dec 2001, pp. 475-501.
[136] N. G. Onuf, *World of Our Making: Rules and rule in social theory and international relations*, Columbia (SC): University of South Carolina Press, 1989.
[137] F. V. Kratochwil, *Rules, Norms and Decisions, On the Conditions of Practical and Legal Reasoning in International Relations and Domestic Affairs*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
[138] A. Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
[139] See also I. Erbas, *Constructivist Approach in Foreign Policy and in International Relations*, Journal of Positive Psychology, Vol. 6, No. 3, 2022, pp.5087-5096.

Ultimately thus, attempts at challenging the supremacy of the state as the fundamental building block of the international system have faced significant conceptual and theoretical hurdles. Such accounts have been forced to use the state as a 'differentiational' point of departure – thus resigning themselves to its theoretical dominance from the outset. Indeed, a truly alternative construct to that of state-based international system would need to both entirely and successfully avoid state-centric nomenclature and comparisons. At the same time, it is clear from the historical context and from the literature that state-centric theories and views of the world fail to explain the increasing mobilisation and organisation of sub-state political forces as well as the way in which these entities are increasingly able to connect with one another in a globalised, technologically connected world. Clandestine actors, in so far, as they actively seek to shape, create or re-engineer social and political structures, thus offer a particularly valuable analytical window into an alternative international 'order' in which these same forces are channelled in pursuit of different aims. It is also possible that in doing so, they are shaping new norms and attitudes as well as challenging traditional notions relating to which political entities can interact within an ever-adapting adapting international system. In this respect, they may well act as a 'vanguard' (to borrow a term often used by Ernesto 'Che' Guevara) not only for political ideologies, but also for wider systemic change at the global level.

PART II: Towards a framework: a structured and illustrated review of existing theory

CHAPTER 3 – Policy choices and strategic direction

Whilst clandestine non-state actors can be conceptualised in broad terms according to their position in relation to the state (see previous chapter), deconstructing their intricate characteristics and behaviours calls for more granular as well as empirical analysis. In order to meet this requirement, and as highlighted in the methodology (Chapter 1), this investigation introduces a bespoke analytical framework providing: **(a)** a vehicle for systematic and comparative analysis across different types of organisations, all the while allowing for contextual nuance; and **(b)** through this approach, a means of addressing the thesis' central research question and accompanying hypotheses. To that end, the next three chapters are organised around the main components (or 'levels') of this analytical framework, namely: groups' ability to formulate policy choices and establish strategic direction; their organisational structures and configurations as power-wielding entities; and, finally, their ability to draw on various levers and instruments of power in pursuit of their objectives.[140] These components, this thesis proposes, essentially amount to the 'building blocks' of clandestine non-state power. As (once again) detailed in the methodology, these same levels of analysis and accompanying detail were identified through a process of qualitative content analysis, involving the structured labelling, cataloguing and review of data as a basis for identifying themes and patterns within both the theoretical literature and real-world case study examples drawn from different contexts around the world.[141]

In turn, this first framework chapter, which is focussed on the policy choices and strategic direction of clandestine non-state actors, is calibrated around the exam's overarching research question in so far as it seeks to ascertain whether these actors deliberately and strategically project power, including as a means of challenging the authority of the state. It is also firmly geared towards testing the thesis' first hypothesis, which posits that clandestine non-state groups display the characteristics and logic of *political* actors, including with respect to carving out (local) spheres of influence, securing strategic partnerships and initiating – or indeed discontinuing – armed and criminal campaigns. Critically, by outlining the various components that make up clandestine policy choices and shape groups' strategic direction, it explains how these actors display significant agency with respect to setting objectives, including with respect to territorial control, designing political and armed campaigns and building alliances.

3.1 Strategic aims and interests – the political nature of clandestine organisations

As we have seen, at a most basic level, clandestine groups have in common that they seek to challenge the authority of the state in one way or another. The extent to which their efforts are calibrated around such a central political aim is heavily reflected in the literature. In his 1937 treatise, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, Mao Tse-tung famously posited that "without a political goal, guerrilla warfare must fail."[142] In turn, and reflecting upon various generations of resistance and rebel movements, Baljit Sign and Ko-Wang Mei thus refer to guerrilla warfare as "a war of totality" that was ultimately aimed at creating a new political order.[143] Carl Schmitt provides a similar account in his *Theory of the Partisan* (1963), highlighting both the "intense political

[140] The framework is also summarised in tabular form in **Annex C**.
[141] Some of these theoretical contributions can be found within the terrorism, insurgency, and criminological literature, whilst others can be extrapolated from the study of wider political theory as well as sociological paradigms. Meanwhile, real world case study examples provide a basis for discerning identifiable and repeatable patterns relating to clandestine organisations of different denominations. Once again, the full list of the groups examined alongside the theory is provided in **Annex A**.
[142] M. Tse-Tung, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, U.S. Marine Corps Publication, FMFRP 12-18, April 1989, p. 42.
[143] B. Singh and K.W. Mei, *Guerrilla Warfare*, India Quarterly, Vol.21, No.3, July-September 1965, pp. 285-310.

engagement that distinguishes the partisan from other fighters" and his focus on fighting on "a political front."[144] Observers of insurgencies throughout the generations such as David Galula, John Nagl and David Ucko have similarly emphasised the extent to which these are driven by political forces which, in turn, need to be placed at the forefront of any response.[145] The potential implications of this steady crescendo of arguments were brought to their logical conclusion by early 21st century commentators such as Barak Mendelsohn and Michael Chertoff, who described the potential for non-state political aspirations to supplant, or at least threaten the survival of, the international and sovereign state system.[146]

To be sure, such political manifestations can be traced back to antiquity, whether through the actions of the mounted and relatively non-hierarchical Scythians who fought Alexander the Great at the battle of Jaxartes in 329 BC or the nationalist Jewish Zealots who conducted targeted assassinations and raids against the Roman garrison at Masada in AD 66.[147] This same rejectionist theme of fighting the illegitimate (political) oppressor has appeared with increased frequency over the past four centuries as a central aim of myriad of non-state groups – perhaps in no small part a reflection of the rise of the nation state. Illustratively, 17th century Protestant Huguenots persecuted by the French Catholic government fled the country in large numbers, subsequently building settlements across Europe as well as in the United States and Africa. Later, British imposition of the far-reaching Stamp Act in 1765 set about a chain of events which led to the American Declaration of Independence and a war that mobilised a vast network of revolutionary cells under the devolved leadership of a non-state political authority: Congress.[148]

Political sentiment became a defining feature of the Napoleonic campaigns of the early 19th century (themselves born out of a revolution) which, *inter alia*, witnessed Spanish and Portuguese Guerrillas rising against the French army during the Peninsular War of 1808-1814 (it is in this context that the term first emerged).[149] Similarly, the Boer Wars of the late 19th century, which featured 'citizen soldier' commandos, were catalysed by British annexation of the South African state of Transvaal.[150] Around the same time, in Somalia, 'Mad' Mullah Muhammad Abdille Hassan declared a *jihad* (or holy war) against Italian, British and Ethiopian 'infidel' colonial forces, spurred on by a vision of a Somalia united in a Muslim brotherhood that transcended clan divisions – an aspiration communicated adeptly through the emotive medium poetry.[151] Given these antecedents, it is perhaps unsurprising that it was a clandestine

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[144] C. Schmitt (Translated by G.L. Ulmen), *Theory of the Partisan: Intermediate Commentary on the Concept of the Political,* New York: Telos Press Publishing, 2007, pp.14-15.
[145] See E. Cohen et *al*., Principles, imperatives and paradoxes of counterinsurgency, Military Review, March-April 2006, pp. 49-53; and D. H. Ucko, *The Insurgent's Dilemma: A Struggle to Prevail*, Oxford Academic (online edition), 2022.
[146] See for example B. Mendelsohn, *Sovereignty under attack: the international society meets the Al Qaeda network*, Review of International Studies, Vol. 31, No. 1, January 2005, pp.45-68; and M. Chertoff, *The Responsibility to Contain: Protecting Sovereignty Under International Law*, Foreign Affairs, Vol. 88, No. 1, February 2009, pp.130-147.
[147] Some commentators such as Kent P. Jackson have argued that the term 'Zealot' did not take hold until AD 68, midway through the Jewish revolt. See K. P. Jackson, *Masada and the World of the New Testament,* Brigham Young University Studies, Vol. 36, No. 3, 1996, p.132. See also S. Appelbaum, *The Zealots: The Case for Revaluation*, The Journal of Roman Studies, vol. 61, 1971, pp. 155–170.
[148] T. H. Breen, *American Insurgents, American Patriots: The Revolution of the People*, Hill and Wang, New York, 2010, pp.121-123.
[149] See for example J. De La Pisa, *Napoleon's Nightmare: Guerrilla Warfare in Spain (1808-1814) - The French Army's Failed Counterinsurgency Effort*, Small Wars Journal, October 2011, pp.6-13
[150] F. Pretorius, *Life on Commando during the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902*, Human & Rousseau, 1999, pp. 111-145 and F. Pretorius, *The Boer Wars: How did the wars in South Africa shake British prestige so badly and cause a major re-evaluation of military tactics in the years before World War One?,* www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/victorians/boer_wars_01.shtml.
[151] *Sayyid Maxamed Cabdulle Xasan: Somalian Leader*, Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2017, ahttps://www.britannica.com/biography/Sayyid-Maxamed-Cabdulle-Xasan. See also J. Fergusson,

non-state organisation, the Serbian nationalist Black Hand, that precipitated World War I when one its members, Gavrilo Princip, assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo on 28 June 1914. [152]

The Great War further catalysed sub-state political forces, including within the context of the Arab Revolt against the Ottomans from 1916, which was fuelled by the ambition to create a new, pan-Arab order. Meanwhile, the Russian revolutions of 1917 and rise of Lenin's Bolshevik party set the stage for subsequent generations of Marxist and communist insurgencies. Two decades later, World War II featured a wide cast list of partisan and resistance groups all the while re-writing the clandestine warfare rulebook and paving the way for post-war anti-colonial and independence movements around the world. From Algeria, which ultimately gained independence from France in 1962, to Malaya and Indochina, localised armed political campaigns gained momentum, whilst the Vietnam war demonstrated how a homegrown insurgency united around a common political aim could prevail against a superpower.[153] A similar feat would later be replicated by the Mujahideen in Afghanistan following the Soviet Union's invasion of the country in 1979, shaping the political narratives of modern Islamist non-state groups.

Clearly, the aim of challenging the existing political order is not limited to clandestine organisations. Indeed, this aim is in fact overtly pursued by many non-violent political movements and opposition parties around the world. However, as we have already seen, clandestine organisations differ from other organisations in their decision to pursue their objectives through policy and strategy choices that are usually considered to be either illegitimate, illegal, or generally outside of the accepted 'rule book' by the prevailing state actor or the international community (which, of course, is formed of a collection of states). Indeed, one of the defining characteristics of clandestine organisation is their tendency to stray beyond existing political and legal structures (although they may choose to do this as part of a blended strategy), and 'cross the Rubicon', adopting violent, co-optive or otherwise subversive approaches as the means through which to secure their interests. While this tendency is perhaps most obvious in the case of guerrillas, rebel movements, violent insurgencies and terrorist organisations whose efforts are typically calibrated at the overtly violent overthrow of the state, it can similarly be observed in the objectives of organised crime actors, who typically pursue the symbiotically connected goals of financial profit and political power.

A large body of evidence thus places the emphasis on organised criminal groups' (often calculated) erosion of the state's political authority through the deliberate co-option of institutions as well as their embeddedness in systems of governance. American organised crime Special Attorney Earl Johnson Jr. once commented that "political corruption is not a primarily legal problem" but is instead "quite logically, a political problem."[154] Louise Shelley goes further, describing attempts by organised crime to penetrate global politics as well as undermine democratic rule and, ultimately, the very concept of the nation state.[155] In a similar vein, James Mittleman and Robert Johnston were amongst the first to describe the global

The World's Most Dangerous Place, Inside the Outlaw State of Somalia, London: Transworld Publishers, 2013, pp. 227-228.

[152] These historical trends are described in more detail in Annex B covering seminal moments in the evolution of clandestine movements.

[153] France's war against the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN) escalated rapidly into urban warfare to the extent that by 1956, over half a million French troops were deployed in Algeria. The British, meanwhile, were also having to develop their own counterinsurgency doctrine within the context of the 1948-60 Malayan Emergency guerrilla war fought between the Communist Malayan National Liberation Army and the Commonwealth armed forces.

[154] E. Johnson Jr., *Organized Crime: Challenge to the American Legal System*, Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology, Vol. 54, Issue 2, Summer 1963, p. 127.

[155] L. I. Shelley, *Transnational Organized Crime: An Imminent Threat to the Nation-State?*, Journal of International Affairs, Vol. 48, No. 2, Winter 1995.

political economy of organised crime, whilst painting a picture of criminal actors as politically savvy, rational, profit-maximising and risk-reducing agents seeking to exploit opportunities presented by globalisation and market liberalisation.[156] Examining more localised manifestations of organised crime, contemporary observers such as Alberto Alesina, Salvatore Piccolo and Paolo Pinotti point to highly calculated attempts by organised crime to subvert the political machinery through strategies such as pre-electoral violence aimed at influencing the behaviours of voters and politicians.[157] Other commentators such as Catalina Uribe Burcher highlight a strategic focus on promoting institutional weakness, subverting the public sector and exploiting 'democratic vulnerabilities' as the means of furthering criminal interests.[158]

The political nature of organised crime and its protagonists is further supported by the examination of different organisations throughout the ages. Illustratively, the origins of modern organised crime can be traced back at least to 19th century Sicily, where *Mafie* militia groups previously employed by wealthy landowners as a bulwark against a Socialist revolt began to turn against their patrons, extorting payments and laying alternative power structures. Indeed, various Mafia branches have long openly professed a rejection of the Italian state and its institutions, particularly within the country's southern regions. The era of the American Prohibition that followed the passing of the Volstead Act in 1920 subsequently witnessed infiltration and co-option of both the political establishment and judicial structures at an unprecedented scale. In 1920s rural China, meanwhile, outlaw bandit gangs wielded significant political power, operating autonomously from the state.[159] Variations of these dynamics would reappear in more contemporary contexts. Pablo Escobar, the head of the infamous Colombian Medellin Cartel, famously cultivated political ambitions that culminated in his election as an alternative representative in the Colombian National Congress, a position that granted him legislative immunity as well as a platform from which to lobby for the repeal of Colombia's extradition treaty with the US.[160] More recently, senior members of the western-backed government of Afghanistan such as Hamid Wali Karzai, the brother of the president, were involved in the country's narcotics trade to such an extent that they arguably became indistinguishable from drug kingpins.[161]

Clearly, strategies and tactics adopted to pursue political and financial ambitions can evolve over time, including through the decision to steer away from clandestine activities altogether or, conversely, to dial-up these same activities. Theorists examining the fundamental forces shaping such policy decisions have ranged from proponents of rational choice theory depicting clandestine as gain-maximising and risk-minimising agents to moral, cultural, and contextual relativists (or, indeed, a combination of the above).[162] Nevertheless, there appears to be a degree of consensus on the idea that clandestine groups will generally adjust their strategies

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[156] J. H. Mittleman and R. Johnston, *The Globalization of Organized Crime, The Courtesan State, and the Corruption of Civil Society*, *Global Governance: A Review of Multilateralism and International Organizations,* Vol. 5, Issue 1, January 1999, pp. 103-126.
[157] A. Alesina, S. Salvatore and P. Pinotti, *Organized Crime, Violence and Politics*, The Review of Economic Studies, Vol. 86, Issue 2, March 2018, pp. 457-499.
[158] C. U. Bucher, *Assessing the Threat of Nexus Between Organized Crime and Democratic Politics: Mapping the Factors*, International Relations and Diplomacy, Vol. 5, No. 1, January 2017, pp. 1-19. See also for K. Chin and R. Godson, *Organized crime and the political-criminal nexus in China*, Trends in Organized Crime, Vol. 9, March 2006, pp. 5-44.
[159] P. Billingsley, *Bandits, Bosses, and Bare Sticks: Beneath the Surface of Local Control in Early Republican China*, Modern China, Vol. 7, No. 3, July 1981, pp. 235–88.
[160] The alleged details of Pablo Escobar's campaign to fight extradition were provided by his brother, Roberto Escobar, in his book entitled: *Escobar: The Inside Story of Pablo Escobar, the World's Most Powerful Criminal* (2009).
[161] D. Filkins, *Death of an Afghan Godfather*, The New Yorker, July 12, 2011.
[162] See for example N. Contegiacomo, *Rational choice theory and the crime-terror nexus: how and why terrorist and organized criminal groups are working together*, 2007, https://doi.org/10.17615/yb5c-vw95.

based on their assessment of their position relative to their original aims, as a result in changes in their circumstances, or when presented with new opportunities. For example, José María Córdova[163] as well as Ben Connable and Martin Libicki[164] argue that factors influencing this decision-making process range from military gains and losses on the battlefield to opportunities to enter into political deals with the state. Alternatively, commentators such as Imanol Murua highlight the role of public sentiment and support bases in shaping the calculations of terrorist groups, including their decision to abandon violence.[165] Further nuance is introduced by observers such as Tim Krieger and Daniel Meierrieks, who emphasise the influence of external (including regional and political) strategic shocks in catalysing terrorist tactics, [166] with a similar account of organised crime is offered by the likes of Francesco Raineri and Luca Strazzari.[167]

Many of these latter dynamics once again transpire through the examination of different armed clandestine organisations around the world. Illustratively, the Jordanian Islamic Front, which acted as the political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood in the country, was increasingly willing to 'play by the political rules' when it became part of the political system in 1989. Similarly, following Hamas' landslide success in the Palestinian parliamentary elections in 2006, the party's Political Bureau opted (at least initially) for more pragmatic policies.[168] Conversely, Boko Haram formerly justified the start of its violent campaign in the wake of a crack-down by the state and the extra-judicial execution of its leader, Mohammed Yousef.[169] The influence of an organisation's support base on its policy decisions can be similarly observed across case studies, including in the case of the Basque terrorist group ETA's decision to abandon violence, or the Lebanese Hezbollah's decision to aid the Assad regime in fighting the Islamic State from 2011 onwards – a reflection of growing concerns within its political constituency about the rise of anti-Shia movements in the region.[170] Meanwhile strategic shocks with a direct bearing on the policy choices of clandestine non-state actors include the Arab Spring, which not only catalysed new movements in the Middle East and North Africa but also provided strategic opportunities for pre-existing players. For example, entire consignments of heavy calibre weapons looted from Libyan arms depots were smuggled across the Sahel to Jihadist

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[163] J. M. Córdova, *Cómo terminan las insurgencias: en busca de la victoria del gobierno*, Revista Científica, Vol. 17, No. 28, Bogotá, October-December 2019.

[164] B. Connable and M. C. Libicki, *How Insurgencies End*, RAND: Santa Monica (CA), 2010, pp. 25-76.

[165] I. Murua, *Ending ETA's armed campaign: How and why the Basque armed group abandoned violence*, New York: Routledge, 2017. See also: A. Perlinger and L. Weinberg, *How Terrorist Groups End*, Countering Terrorism Center Sentinel, Vol. 3, Issue 2, February 2010.

[166] T. Krieger and D. Meierrieks, *What Causes Terrorism?* Public Choice, Vol. 147, No. 1/2, April 2011, pp. 3-27.

[167] L. Raineri and F. Strazzari, *Organised crime and fragile states: African variations*, European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS), March 2017.

[168] N. Kubikova, *Political Inclusion as a Key Factor to Moderate Islamists: The International Community's Choice of Policy Impacts on Hamas's Pragmatic or Radical Tendencies*, Perspectives, Institute of International Relations, Vol. 17. No. 2, 2009, pp. 139-161

[169] To date, the conflict has resulted in the death of at least thirty thousand people and the displacement of over two million. See for example '*Why Boko Haram uses female suicide-bombers*,' The Economist, October 2017, https://www.economist.com/the-economist-explains/2017/10/23/why-boko-haram-uses-female-suicide-bombers; and M. Okwuchi Nwankpa, *The Political Economy of Securitisation: The Case of Boko Haram, Nigeria*, The Economics of Peace and Security Journal, Vol. 10, No. 1, 2015 pp. 32-39.

[170] See D. Byman and B. Y. Saab, *Hezbollah in a Time of Transition*, Atlantic Council, November 2014, p. 2.

Reciprocally - and as well as promoting Shia interests - the group's popularity amongst its base is also tied to the perception that Hezbollah offers a means of social mobility and political ascent within Lebanon, particularly amongst the working class. See for example: M. Alami, *The Role of Hezbollah Among its Shia Constituents*, Atlantic Council, February 2018, available online at: http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/the-role-of-hezbollah-among-its-shia-constituents

groups in Mali by Tuaregs formerly employed by Muammar Gaddafi, catapulting Jihadist territorial gains in 2012.[171] For organised groups, enabling strategic developments, 'black swan' events and shocks have ranged from conflicts, as seen in the cases of the Balkans, Sahel, Latin America, and Afghanistan, to the breaking down of previous monopolies, such as within the context of the Colombian cocaine trade. Furthermore, the Covid-19 pandemic fuelled a lucrative black market for medical products, whilst also offering an opportunity for criminal organisations to provide humanitarian 'aid' or small loans to local communities and businesses, thus increasing their social and political legitimacy.[172]

3.2 Geographical spheres of influence

One of the many contributions emanating from the fields of international relations and political science relates to the concept of spheres of influence, or the consolidation of power within a specific geographic area or territory. Spheres of influence, or "international formations that contain one nation (the influencer) that commands superior power over others"[173] have long formed the bedrock of geopolitics and accounts of great power rivalry. These have also been used as a reference and starting point for different theories describing the calculations and rationales of as well as relations between (state) powers operating within the international system. For example, Structural Realists have argued that a power will typically yield territory to a peer competitor that possesses a stronger material interest in that same territory, whilst proponents of ideological distance theory suggest that a larger power will "steadfastly oppose ceding an ideologically homogeneous small[er] power to the sphere of an ideologically divergent peer competitor."[174] Critically however, contemporary thinkers such as Van Jackson have argued that the concept of spheres of influence carries relevance beyond interactions between states given that it describes practices of control and exclusion that can be found within any hierarchy.[175]

In theory, the notion of spheres of influence can thus be extended to the realm of clandestine non-state actors, helping to explain their propensity towards exerting sway over defined geographical zones. Their control over domestic – or 'home' – territories may thus be expanded upon via the annexation of, or forays into, 'away' territories, both in their near-abroad and further afield. This line of argument might further posit that the carving out of spheres of influence can occur at different levels even within the clandestine 'order'. On the one end of the spectrum, this might consist of 'micro' spheres of influence, such as when hyper-local criminal gangs attain dominant status in neighbourhood housing blocks located in inner-city areas. Actors operating on the other end of the spectrum may instead look to secure much larger territorial pockets, as reflected in the aims of groups such as the PLO, ISIS, the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC), al Shabaab and the Viet Cong. The study of organised crime also demonstrates the extent to which the forging of new spheres of influence may be shaped by illicit business opportunities. Illustratively – and displaying a common feature of modern organised crime networks – Mayer Lansky, a key figure of the early 20th century underworld who had made his fortune in the gambling business, gradually

[171] See for example E. Basar, U*nsecured Libyan Weapons - Regional Impact and Possible Threats*, Civil-Military Fusion Centre, November 2012.
[172] J. P. Sullivan and R. J. Bunker (Reviewed by G. Frias), *COVID-19, Gangs, and Conflict*, *Journal of Strategic Security, Vol.* 14, No. 2, January 2021, pp. 122–25.
[173] A. Etzioni, *Spheres of Influence: A Reconceptualization*, in Lights Out For Oil? The Climate After Paris, The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs, Summer 2015, p. 117.
[174] E. N. Resnick, *Interests, ideologies, and great power spheres of influence*, European Journal of International Relations, Vol. 28, Issue 3, June 2022, pp. 563–588.
[175] V. Jackson, *Understanding spheres of influence in international politics*, European Journal of International Security, Vol.5, Issue 3, October 2019, pp. 255-273.

expanded his operation beyond New York, including within the lucrative market that was pre-revolution Cuba.[176]

Realists and other defenders of the state paradigm have been quick to point to the relatively large body of literature that argues that such non-state spheres of influence and control often coalesce and extend outwards from fragile contexts characterised by weak governance and/or the absence of the state.[177] This argument is usually closely tied to the assumption that the absence of (formal) governance systems both constitutes a source of legitimacy for non-state actor and offers them the freedom of movement required to subvert or undermine the state. Thus, Herbert Wulf posits that "in weak and failing states, and in many post-conflict situations, the state typically lacks the capacity to protect its monopoly on force."[178] Comparing the Italian Mafia with drug gangs in Mexico, Central America and Colombia, Daron Acemoglu *et al.* similarly conclude that "these organisations appear to have partly filled the void created by a weak state."[179] Taking a more macro view, a recent United States National Intelligence Council Memorandum concluded that these protagonists thrived in "a more divided and contested global landscape" characterised by "less adaptable institutions and greater capability and resourcing available outside [of] governments."[180] Even then, the view that the ability of clandestine non-state actors to exert influence is merely a product of governance or development failures may be oversimplistic. For example, such a position does not fully explain how right-wing movement such as the Reichburger in Germany or white supremacist groups in the United States have emerged within the context of highly developed, democratic nations.

Other observers have injected more nuance into the debate. For example, thinkers such as William Reno,[181] Peter Reuter,[182] as well as Stephen Ellis and Mark Shaw[183] emphasise the extent to which clandestine non-state actors may also end up serving the interests of state actors, including with respect to the management, protection and collection of illicit rent. This suggests a degree of overlap, if not symbiosis, between the spheres of influence of state and non-state actors, particularly when the latter operate as part of state-sanctioned governance systems and, therefore, as instruments of state rule. Accordingly, Paul Staniland explains that even wartime political orders may "range from collusion and shared sovereignty to spheres of influence and tacit coexistence, to clashing monopolies and guerrilla disorder."[184] Separately, a rounded analysis of factors enabling non-state spheres of influence should also likely account for their ability to project power across different domains, including within the cognitive and informational realm, aided by the global proliferation of modern information technologies.

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[176] See for example M. Gosch and R. Hammer, *The Last Testament of Lucky Luciano: The Mafia Story in His Own Words,* Enigma Books, New York, 2013. Certain elements of Luciano's account were nevertheless disputed by the Federal Bureau of Investigation who considered him an unreliable character.

[177] This was also one of the key arguments put forward by American neo-conservatives the early 21st century.

[178] H, Wulf, *The Privatization of Violence: A Challenge to State-Building and the Monopoly on Force*, The Brown Journal of World Affairs, Vol. 18, No. 1, Fall- Winter 2011, p. 137.

[179] D. Acemoglu, G. De Feo, and D. De Luca, *Weak States: Causes and Consequences of the Sicilian Mafia*, Review of Economic Studies, No.87, 2020, p. 538.

[180] *Non-State Actors Playing Greater Roles in Governance and International Affairs*, National Intelligence Council, Office of the Director of National Intelligence, July 2023 (Approved for release May 2024), pp. 1-7.

[181] See W. Reno, p. 437.

[182] P. , *Systemic Violence in Drug Markets, Crime*, Law & Social Change, No.52, Issue 3, September 2009, pp. 275-284.

[183] S. Ellis and M. Shaw, *Does organized crime exist in Africa?,* African Affairs, Vol. 114, Issue 457, October 2015, pp. 505–528.

[184] P. Staniland, *States, Insurgents and Wartime Political Orders*, Perspectives on Politics, Vol. 12, Issue 2, June 2012, p. 243.

3.3 External relations: cooperation and competition

Attempts to carve out defined spheres of influence can also help to explain some of the dynamics underpinning inter-group and (as briefly introduced above) state-non state relations. Indeed, clandestine organisations of all denominations demonstrate a propensity to forge partnerships in pursuit of their strategic goals, although the forces and drivers shaping these relationships have been the subject of considerable debate over the years. May Darwich thus posits that (armed) non-state actors not only "challenge state authority in the international system through the use of violence and military means" but are also capable of "maintaining foreign relations and carrying out what looks like foreign policy with other non-state actors during both war and peace times."[185] More granularly, some scholars have argued that cooperation between militant organisations is most likely when these face substantial repression from the state and/or when groups share a similar ideological outlook, typically resulting in material cooperation.[186] Others, such as Samuel Mulliins and Adam Dolnik, offer a somewhat alternative position, claiming instead that "there are numerous instances of cooperation between terrorists and criminals at different levels."[187] According to Phil Williams, cooperation among criminal organisations is "widespread, even though it typically remains fragile and can easily be broken down."[188] In a similar vein, Manuel Castells posits that the "internationalisation of criminal activities induces organised crime from different countries to establish strategic alliances to cooperate [...] on each other's turf through subcontracting arrangements and joint ventures" in what amounts to a (global) "network enterprise."[189] Writing about international terrorism, Brian Phillips similarly suggests that interorganisational relationships are one of the key determinants of a group's longevity.[190]

In turn, examples of inter-group cooperation throughout the ages are plentiful. During the American Prohibition era, Charles 'Lucky' Luciano, the 'boss of bosses' who became the leader of New York City's five big Italian criminal families, promoted the idea of a National Crime Syndicate, also known as 'the Commission', which sought to manage disputes and establish both operating guidelines and deconfliction mechanisms.[191] Strategic cooperation between criminal actors would later become a central characteristic of modern organised crime – the means through which to connect different specialised functions along transnational supply chains. Thus, European wholesale cocaine importers such as the 'Ndrangheta branch of the Italian Mafia and Albanian organised crime groups both collude with each other and with cocaine-producing cartels in Latin America. Inter-group partnerships and cooperation structures is also a recurring feature of (international) terrorist, rebel, rejectionist, guerrilla and

[185] M. Darwich, p. 2.
[186] C.W. Blair, E. Chenoweth *et al*., *Honor Among Thieves: Understanding Rhetorical and Material Cooperation Among Violent Non-State Actors*, Harvard Dataverse, 2021, https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/PHUSUM.
[187] S. J. Mullins and A. Dolnik, *Relations between violent non-state actors and ordinary crime*, in L. Fenstermacher, L. Kuznar, T. Rieger and A. Speckhard (eds), *Current Multi-Disciplinary Perspective on Root Causes, The Role of Ideology, and Programs for Counter-Radicalization and Disengagement*, Topical Strategic Multi-Layer Assessment (SMA) Multi-Agency and Air Force Research Laboratory Multi-Disciplinary White Papers in Support of Counter-Terrorism and Counter-WMD, 2010, pp. 219-227.
[188] P. Williams, *Illicit markets, weak states and violence: Iraq and Mexico,* Crime, Law & Social *Change*, Vol. *52*, No. 3 2009, pp. 323–336.
[189] M. Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture* (Vol. 3), End of Millennium, Oxford: Blackwell, 1998, p. 172.
[190] B. J. Phillips, *Terrorist Group Cooperation and Longevity*, International Studies Quarterly, Vol. 58. No. 2, June 2014, pp.3 36-347.
[191] *Lucky Luciano*, Organised Crime (1897-1962), https://www.biography.com/people/lucky-luciano-9388350. Luciano allegedly later offered to contact his criminal connections in Sicily to aid the Allied advance into Italy during World War II. See also J. Tagliabue, *Villalba Journal: How Don Carlo (and Patton) Won the War in Sicily*, New York Times, May 1994.

insurgent movements. Illustratively, ten Palestinian factions (of very different sizes) favouring armed activity and the derailment of the Oslo Accords joined forces in 1993 under the auspices of Damascus-based Alliance of Palestinian Forces (APF).[192] In a similar conceptual vein to Luciano's criminal Commission, the Alliance demonstrated how even non-state actors could establish 'supra' (and, indeed, quasi-multilateral) structures to promote cooperation. Al Qaeda, moreover, considered the forging of partnerships with franchised or aligned groups around the world its core purpose and as being critical to achieving its strategic aims. More locally, Iyad ag Ghali, a Tuareg powerbroker who rose to prominence in the Sahel as the leader of Ansar al Din, developed strategic partnerships with secular rebel groups in northern Mali to expand his organisation's influence before turning on those same groups and consolidating his political control over trading centres such as Timbuktu.[193]

At the same time, clandestine non-state organisations can also find themselves competing to the point of (at times) open warfare. Returning to the theme of spheres of influence and non-state power projection, a useful concept that can be borrowed from the field International Relations theory is that of the Thucydides Trap, which Harvard's Graham Allison describes as the increased likelihood of war when an emerging power challenges a ruling one (the term draws on the threat that Sparta saw in the rise of Athens at the time of the Peloponnesian War in 431 BC).[194] Despite a prevailing tendency to view war as the prerogative of the state, a number of observers have argued that such a structural pattern is indeed discernible at the sub-state level.[195] Illustratively, Michael von der Schulenburg, a former United Nations Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs, argues that whilst volent conflicts amongst armed non-state actors have always existed, these have "for the first time since we have nation states [...] replaced interstate wars as the dominant form of organised violent conflicts."[196] Other thinkers have similarly commented on the tendency for violent conflict to emerge as a result of "contested incompatibility between two or more [non-state] parties"[197] as well as on the propensity for strategic competition over political and/or market dominance.[198] For example, Archim Wennmann describes violence between non-state actors as "a means to enter markets controlled by a competing group" as well as method of arbitration between competing entities.[199] Phil Williams similarly posits that "whilst cooperation among criminal organisations is widespread, [...] it typically remains fragile and can easily break down."[200] Sean McFate, for his part, describes the emergence of 'durable disorders' in which enduring and often-inconclusive clashes between armed non-state actors have become a

[192] See for example A. Strindberg, T*he Damascus-Based Alliance of Palestinian Forces: A Primer*, Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 29, No. 3, Spring 2000, pp. 60-76.
[193] See also *Mali Jihadist Leader in Secret Talks with Northern Groups*, Agence France-Presse, January 31, 2023.
[194] G. Allison, *The Thucydides Trap*, Foreign Policy, June 2017, https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/06/09/the-thucydides-trap/. See also L. Whyte, *The Real Thucydides Trap*, The Diplomat, May 2016, https://thediplomat.com/2015/05/the-real-thucydides-trap/.
[195] See for example, B. J. Steele and J. L. Amoureux, *Hizbollah, Israel and the Perversity of Just War*' in E.J. Heinze and B. J. Steele (eds.), *Ethics, Authority, and War: Non-state Actors and the Just War Tradition*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, p. 179.
[196] M. von der Schulenburg, *The Era of Armed Non-State Actors – Risks of Global Chaos*, Oxford University, https://conflictplatform.ox.ac.uk/cccp/research/michael-von-der-schulenburg-the-era-of-armed-non-state-actors-risks-of-global-chaos.
[197] I. Briscoe, *A violent compound: competition, crime and modern conflict*, Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre, November 2015, p. 1.
[198] See for example C. Gürer, *Strategic Competition: International Order and Transnational Organized Crime*, Security Insights Vol. 69, George C. Marshall Center for Security Studies, September 2021.
[199] A. Wennmann*, Crime and Conflict*, GSDRC, University of Birmingham, March 2015, https://gsdrc.org/professional-dev/crime-and-conflict/
[200] P. Williams, p. 325.

standard feature of the international system, signalling a return to pre-Westphalian norms when states did not enjoy a monopoly over the use of force.[201]

Such adversarial dynamics can once again be evidenced through the study of different clandestine organisations. Returning to the generally insightful era of the American Prohibition, Alphonse 'Scarface' Capone, who controlled the Chicago Outfit crime syndicate that dominated the city's underworld in the mid to late 1920s, famously demonstrated the propensity for inter-gang rivalry to spill into violence when he ordered his men to pose as policemen and gun down seven members of the rival Bugs Moran gang in what became known as the 1929 St Valentine's Day Massacre.[202] Such dynamics would become a defining characteristic of modern day Mexico, where competition between cartels over the control of the lucrative cocaine trade has escalated into all out inter-gang turf wars. Reflecting the logic of the Thucydides Trap, this violence has in no small part been catalysed by the rise or entry of new players seeking to displace existing actors, as seen in the case of the Sinaloa's Cartel's encroachment onto Tijuana and Gulf Cartel territory or the aggressive expansionist policy of Los Zetas, a Gulf Cartel splinter group counting former elite soldiers amongst its ranks.[203] In another illustrative example, the Hells Angels Motorcycle Club has a longstanding history of violence with its arch-rival, the Mongols Motorcycle Club, who wrestled territorial control from the Angels in Southern California in the 1980s. The 'war' between the groups led to a range of alliances and partnerships in what can almost be described as a gang-based balance of power (the Mongols, for example, are allied with the likes of the Bandidos, Sons of Silence, Outlaws and Pagans). Clashes between the two organisations and their allies have, over the years, been deadly and included everything from targeted killings to spontaneous shootouts in casinos and bars. Thus, in 2008, a member of the Bandidos killed the Hell's Angels San Francisco President, Mark 'Papa' Guardado, whilst the Hells Angels assassinated the leader of the Pagans Bronx Chapter in New York in May 2020.[204] The bad blood between the motorcycle gangs runs so deep that the Mongols reportedly have a dedicated "Respect few, fear none" tattoo worn by those within the group who have killed or injured a member of the Hells Angels.[205]

Similar altercations and rivalries are also observable within the context of armed non-state groups such as insurgencies and terrorist groups. From 2013, Shia Hezbollah fighters became increasingly present in the conflict in Syria, siding with the Assad regime as a counterweight to the proliferation of (primarily) Sunni armed groups in the country,[206] a trend most clearly illustrated by the territorial gains made by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). "The idiot," explained Hassan Nasrallah, the party's former secretary general, "is the one who watches the conspiracy crawling toward him but doesn't move."[207] Going on the offensive early against rival and opponent factions was therefore considered a means of protecting the group's interests whilst the political balance in Syria was still in flux. Factionalism between groups also

[201] S. McFate, *Durable Disorder: The Return of Private Armies and the Emergence of Neomedievalism*, London School of Economics, August 2011.
[202] See also See *Solving Scarface: How the Law Finally Caught Up with Al Capone*, Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) Archives, March 2005 and Al Capone, US National Archives, https://www.archives.gov/exhibits/american_originals/capone.html.
[203] See for example I. Grillo, *El Narco: The Bloody Rise of Mexican Drug Cartels*, London: Bloomsbury, 2012, pp.77
[204] E. Shanahan and W.K. Rashbaum, *Hells Angels Accused in Brazen Killing of Rival Biker Gang Leader*, The New York Times, 22 July 2020.
[205] D. Shields, *The Infamous 'One Percenters': A Review of the Criminality, Subculture, and Structure of Modern Biker Gangs*, Justice Policy Journal, Vol. 9, No. 1, Spring 2012, p. 20.
[206] Other aims included opening a new front against it's arch enemy, Israel, in the Golan Heights. See M. H. Ali, *Power Points Defining the Syria-Hezbollah Relationship*, Carnegie Middle East Centre, March 2019, https://carnegie-mec.org/2019/03/29/power-points-defining-syria-hezbollah-relationship-pub-78730.
[207] *Ibid*.

emerged between Sunni organisations - most notably al Qaeda-affiliated Jabhat Al Nusra and ISIS. Indeed, the tensions between the two organisations ranged from distrust to takeover attempts (ISIS' ex-leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, declared al Nusra to be part of his organisation), to outright violence.[208] Such divisions demonstrated that ideological similarities alone may be insufficient to guard against competition over either territory and/or support bases. To be sure, the experience of wider contexts such as Libya and Sahelian states suggests that hostile relations between groups vying for political or economic control has been a common characteristic of contemporary armed conflicts, which have become more protracted in recent years.[209]

The above example of Hezbollah's alliance with the Assad regime also re-introduces the theme of state–non-state relations, which have again been the subject of theoretical debate. Paul Staniland, for example suggests that bargains and deals between state and armed non-state actors, including relating to shared sovereignty and tacit coexistence, are common within civil war contexts, shaping patterns of governance and violence and, ultimately, wartime political orders.[210] Taking more of an 'outside in' lens, observers such as Idean Salehyan highlight the extent to which foreign states employ or delegate activities to clandestine non-state actors within the context of proxy conflicts, even if this may result in losing a degree of foreign policy autonomy.[211] Moreover, in *States in Disguise* (2016), Belgin San-Akca explains that the processes and decisions involved in forging state–non-state alliances are not solely the product of state decisions as indeed, non-state actors equally select their foreign (state) patrons on the basis of their mutual ideological and strategic interests.[212] Bridget Coggins similarly discusses the concept of "rebel diplomacy," in which armed actors "engage in strategic communication with foreign governments or agents, or with an occupying regime they deem foreign."[213] Reyko Huang adds that such 'proto-diplomacy' is typically aimed at enhancing actors' international credibility and recognition while constituting a "choice for rebel groups seeking political capital within an international system that places formidable barriers to entry on non-state entities."[214]

Additional nuance can be found within the organised crime literature which, on the whole, describes a relational dynamic that extends beyond a binary distinction between state and non-state elements. For example, Luca Raineri and Francesco Strazzari posit that "the relationship between criminal groups and the state is subject to significant variation and evolution across time and space, ranging from predatory to parasitic and symbiotic models."[215] Iztok Prezelj and Nina Vogrinčič similarly describe the notion of 'state capture' involving complex mutual relations and "a corrupt nexus among organised crime, business, politics, security services and the judiciary" that can extend to entire regions.[216]

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[208] See D. L. Byman and J. R. Williams, *ISIS vs. Al Qaeda: Jihadism's global civil war*, Brookings, February 2015, https://www.brookings.edu/articles/isis-vs-al-qaeda-jihadisms-global-civil-war/.
[209] See for example W. R. Avis, *Current Trends in Violent Conflict*, K4D, University of Birmingham, March 2019.
[210] P. Staniland, pp. 243-264.
[211] I. Salehyan, *The Delegation of War to Rebel Organizations*, Journal of Conflict Resolution, Vol. 54, No. 3, June 2010, pp. 493–515.
[212] B. San-Akca, *States in Disguise: Causes of State Support for Rebel Groups*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, p. 140.
[213] B. Coggins, *Rebel Diplomacy: Theorizing Violent Non-State Actors' Strategic Use of Talk*, In A. Arjona, N. Kasfir et al. (Eds), *Rebel Governance in Civil War*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015, p.107.
[214] R. Huang, *Rebel Diplomacy in Civil War*, *International Security,* Vol. 40, Issue 4, Spring 2016, p. 89.
[215] L. Raineri and F. Strazzari, p. 2.
[216] I. Prezelj and N. O. Vogrinčič, *Criminal and networked state capture in the Western Balkans: the case of the Zemun clan*, Southeast European and Black Sea Studies, Vol. 20, Issue 4, December 2020, p. 547.

Supporting elements of the above theory, the historical analysis of these state–non-state relations indeed suggests that these are most visible during periods of multipolarity or increased contestation in the international system, when states tend to look for proxy or indirect (and, therefore, deniable) levers of influence aimed at gaining a comparative advantage over competitors. Between 1650 and 1730, in the aftermath of the Peace of Westphalia, European powers increasingly turned to private maritime raiders known as privateers to erode other economic influence indirectly on the high seas in an early example of state-sponsored proxy warfare.[217] American revolutionaries later received support from Spain and France, whilst in Spanish Louisiana, France recruited a network of informants that included fishermen and members of the clergy to report on British movements and intentions.[218] Proxy warfare using such actors subsequently became a feature of the 'War of 1812' fought between the United Stated and Britain and of Napoleonic campaigns in a pattern that would later become a regular feature of 20th century warfare. Thus, the First World War saw the inclusion of clandestine actors within larger warfighting campaign plans following the Arab Revolt against the Ottomans.

Following World War I, Irish Republican Army guerrillas led by Michael Collins during the Irish War of Independence (1919-1921) received significant support, intelligence and direction from the Dublin centre.[219] The Spanish Civil War of 1936-1939 fought between Nationalists and the left-wing Spanish Republican government involved a heavy element of external and proxy interference described by Hugh Thomas as a "world war in miniature." [220] On the one side, the conflict featured the provision of equipment, weapons and 'advisers' by Italy and Germany to the Nationalist Rebels, including German JU-52 aircraft and volunteer pilots who transported Franco's Morocco-based troops across the strait of Gibraltar to take part in combat operations.[221] On the other (Republican) side, the Soviet Union directed popular resistance 'guerrilleros' trained in guerrilla warfare schools operated by the Soviet NKVD mission in Loyalist Spain.[222]

State backing of clandestine non-state resistance and subversive organisations subsequently became a prominent feature of the Second World War. In the early years of the war, the heavy military setbacks suffered by Great Britain compelled it to explore alternative approaches to undermine the Axis advance. Partisan movements operating in occupied territories and behind enemy lines offered a means of eroding and degrading enemy morale and cohesion or, as Winston Churchill somewhat more dramatically put it, "set Europe ablaze."[223] Thus, British

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[217] C. J. Nolan, *The Age of War of Religion, 1000 - 1650*, *An Encyclopedia of Global Warfare and Civilisation*, Volume 2, Greenwood Press, London, 2006, p.682; and L. Sicking, *Neptune and the Netherlands: State, Economy and the War at Sea in the Renaissance*, History of Warfare Volume 23, Brill, Leiden, 2004, pp. 422-423.

[218] See for example L. D. Ferreiro, *Brothers at Arms: American Independence and the Men of France and Spain Who Saved It*, Borzoi Books, New York, 2016.

[219] M. Mulholland, review of *The Republic: The Fight for Irish Independence, 1918-1923*, Review No. 1516, http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/1516.

[220] R. Baxell, *British Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War: the British Battalion in the International Brigades 1936-1939*, London: Routledge, 2004, p. 3.

[221] Germany's support to Franco was later formalised by way of a Condor Legion (essentially an integrated task force) which contained both ground and air elements as a means of coordinating Luftwaffe sorties with tactical land-based activity. See W. A. Musciano, *Spanish Civil War: German Condor Legion's Tactical Air Power*, Aviation History, December 2006, http://www.historynet.com/spanish-civil-war-german-condor-legions-tactical-air-power.htm.

[222] The NKVD, for instance, ran six guerrilla training schools. B. Whaley, pp.49-61 and B. Volodarsky, *Stalin's Agent: The Life & Death of Alexander Orlov*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, pp.182-189.

[223] P. Howarth, Undercover: The Men and Women of the Special Operations Executive, Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, London, 1980, p. 3

Special Operations Executive (SOE) and American Office of Strategic Services (OSS)-supported elements recruited clandestine cells, conducted high profile assassinations and acts of sabotage and disseminated anti-German propaganda amongst local populations. Interestingly, the choice of the term 'OSS' by its founder, US American General William Donovan, reflected his sense of the 'strategic' importance of intelligence and clandestine operations in modern war."[224] The era witnessed a continuation of some of the evolutions witnessed in the Spanish Civil War through the implementation of formal training camps and programs for irregular agents. An illustrative example of this was the Camp 'X' training centre, located along the north shore of Lake Ontario on a Canadian Broadcasting Corporation site (a deliberate cover), where agents were instructed in sabotage and guerrilla warfare.[225] The Allies also produced doctrine and instruction manuals with colourful names such as the *Partisan Leader's Handbook* and the *Art of Guerrilla Warfare*, intended as an *aide memoire* to agents. Although classified at the time of publication, these were translated into several languages, including French, Dutch, Norwegian, Polish, Malay and Chinese, out of operational necessity. In turn, and somewhat ironically perhaps, many of these products found their way into the hands of post-war insurgencies who employed them against the very countries who had authored them.[226]

Unsurprisingly, the (non-state) clandestine playbook became a regular feature of the Cold War, a period during which two superpowers, unable to confront each other directly on the battlefield, routinely turned to proxy and deniable instruments of power to undermine each other's influence in various political theatres around the world. Declassified Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) documents from the early 1960s thus reveal the ways in which the Agency recruited exiled Cuban and other foreign commercial pilots as part of covert American proxy operations aimed at countering Communist influence in the resource-rich and newly independent Republic of the Congo (today's Democratic Republic of Congo).[227] Around the same time, in Laos, the US secured the loyalty of powerful tribal drug lords in its attempts to thwart the spread of Communism across the region.[228] The US was not alone in its support of proxy groups. China acted as a state sponsor to Viet Minh during the First Indochina War, providing it with weapons and equipment,[229] and (alongside the Soviet Union) similarly supported and equipped the Viet Cong insurgency fighting US forces in Vietnam.[230] In the mid-

[224] *'What was OSS?', The Office of Strategic Services: America's First Intelligence Agency*, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Publication, March 2007, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/intelligence-history/oss/art03.htm.

[225] The camp also served as a centre for the production of forged documents, including passports and three-dimensional and full-scale replicas of targets, some of which were used in the planning phases of Heydrich's assassination (Operation Anthropoid). Underwater demolition devices and one-man submarines were tested in the lake. See W. Stevenson, *A Man Called Intrepid: The incredible WWII Narrative of the hero whose spy network and secret diplomacy changed the course of history,* Guilford (CT): The Lyons Press, 2000, pp.196-198.

[226] *The Secret Agent's Pocket Manual 1939-1945: The Original Espionage Field-Manual of the Second World War Spies*, London: Conway (Bloomsbury), 2009, p.26.

[227] D. Robarge, *CIA's Covert Operations in the Congo, 1960-1968: Insights from Newly Declassified Documents*, Studies in Intelligence, Vol. 58 No.3, Central Intelligence Agency, September 2014. See also F. R. Villafana, *Cold War in the Congo: The Confrontation of Cuban Military Forces 1960-1967*, London: Transaction Publishers, 2012, p. 37; and J. Prados, *Safe for Democracy: The Secret Wars of the CIA*, Chicago: Ivan R. Dee Publisher, 2006, p. 326.

[228] A. W. McCoy, *The Costs of Covert Warfare: Airpower, Drugs, and Warlords in the Conduct of U.S Foreign Policy*, New England Journal of Public Policy, Vol.19, Issue 1, Article 14, September 2003, p.223.
See also M. Aldrich *et al*, *New Opium War*, CIA Library (declassified August 2001), https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP73B00296R000300060028-3.pdf

[229] Chinese-supplied artillery and 37mm anti-aircraft guns played a critical role in Giap's hard-fought defeat of the French at Dien Bien Phu in 1954 and in the Vietnam War.

[230] See F.C. Parker, *Vietnam and Soviet Asian Strategy*, Asian Affairs: An American Review, Vol. 4, No. 2, Nov-Dec 1976, pp. 94-116.

1980s, in Afghanistan, the US again reciprocated by funnelling equipment, including Stinger anti-aircraft missiles, via Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence agency (ISI) to anti-Soviet resistance groups fighting the Soviet Union under the banner of the Mujahideen. [231]

Manifestations of support for clandestine non-state actors endured beyond the Cold War. Just as Damascus had allowed the Kurdistan's Workers Party (PKK) to reassemble itself on Syrian territory in the 1980s, the Taliban offered a sanctuary to a Qaeda during the 1990s, while Pakistan similarly provided support to both the Taliban and the Kashmiri Lashkar-e-Taiba as a means of pursuing its foreign policy interests.[232] Some of this support, including Iranian support for groups such as the Lebanese Hezbollah, Iraqi Badr, Houthis in Yemen and elements of the Syria resistance, can loosely be placed in the category of proxy campaigns aimed at countering Israeli, US and Sunni (including Saudi) influence in the region.[233] Other state–non-state connections have revealed themselves to be more fluid. Illustratively, the infamous arms dealer Viktor Bout, was reportedly employed by US Department of Defence contractors in the early days of the Iraq War to transport supplies and material required for the war effort, all the while enjoying close ties to the Russian political establishment.[234] Indeed, Russia began fine-tuning its own use of militias, criminal elements and private security companies around the world – including the Wagner Group, an opaque collection of private military contractors – to project its influence in the Donbas, Middle East as well as North and Sub-Saharan Africa. [235]

3.4 Strategic logic and sequencing

"The whole secret of successful fighting," George Bernard Shaw wrote in *Arms and the Man,* "is to get the enemy at a disadvantage; and never, on any account, fight him on equal terms."[236] For his part, Basil Liddell Hart once commented that guerrilla warfare was "far more intellectual than a bayonet charge."[237] His comment hinted at the extent to which clandestine operations

[231] US support for the Mujahideen reached US $650 million by 1987. See B. Rubin, *Fragmentation of Afghanistan: State Formation and Collapse in the International System*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995, pp.180-181. Some of the commanders who benefited from this support – a case in point being Jalaluddin Haqqani, founder of the Haqqani network – went on to serve in the Taliban government after the movement came to power in 1996 and would become a thorn in the side of NATO forces two decades later. See for example M. Rosenberg, *Founder of Haqqani Network Is Long Dead, Aide Says*, New York Time, July 2015.

[232] See for example E. Schricker, *The Search for Rebel Independence: A study of the Afghan and Pakistani Taleban*, Sage Journals, Vol. 4, Issue 1, January 2017, pp. 16-30.

[233] This is despite occasional ideological differences between the regime and local beneficiaries. Afshon Ostovar, for example, highlights some of the differences between the Houthi Shia ideology and Iran's. The latter are proponents of Zaydi (rather than Twelver) Shiism who do not recognise the supreme authority of the Iranian leadership in religious affairs.

[234] Bout's aircraft, registered under the company Irbis Air, were allegedly subcontracted by US Air Mobility Command and KBR (owned by Halliburton) according to *The Spiegel*.
See '*Trapping the Lord of War: The Rise and Fall of Viktor Bout*', Spiegel Online, October 2010, http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/trapping-the-lord-of-war-the-rise-and-fall-of-viktor-bout-a-721532.html. Bout's arrest by US authorities in Thailand triggered diplomatic tensions between Washington and Moscow, the latter of whom included Bout's prosecuting attorney on a list of US officials barred from entering Russia. See N. Hong, *'Convicted Arms Dealer Viktor Bout Returns to U.S. Appeals Court,'* The Wall Street Journal, October 2016, https://www.wsj.com/articles/convicted-arms-dealer-viktor-bout-returns-to-u-s-appeals-court-1477825206.

[235] See for example A. MacKinnon, *Russia's Shadowy Mercenaries Offer Humanitarian Aid to Clean Image*, Foreign Policy July 2020, available online at: https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/07/22/wagner-group-russia-syria-libya-mercenaries.

[236] B. Shaw, *Arms and the Man* (edited by R. Blatchford), London, Pearson Education Ltd., 1991, p. 46.

[237] P. Satia, *Centralité des marges: Les campagnes britanniques au Moyen-Orient pendant la Grande Guerre*, Les Éditions de l'EHESS, Volume 71, Issue 1, March 2016, p. 95.

reflected a clear strategic logic and accompanying planning processes. In turn, the dominant traits discernible within the strategic approaches typically favoured by clandestine non-state actors have a long lineage. As early as the Second Punic War of 218-201 BC, the Roman Quintus Fabius Maximus Verrucosus caused controversy in Rome when he instructed forces to shy away from direct engagement with Hannibal's superior forces, whilst at the same time attacking his supply lines – an asymmetric logic that would become known as the Fabian Strategy.[238] In the 6th century BC, the Chinese General and strategist Sun Tzu similarly drew a distinction between 'direct' and 'indirect' methods of attack, arguing that the two "in combination give rise to an endless combination of manoeuvres."[239] Inevitably, such tactics would re-emerge as well as ebb and flow throughout history, although growing in prominence in the modern, post-Westphalian era. In 17th century Canadian Quebec (then *Nouvelle France*), the French found themselves at war against the Iroquois Confederation who took umbrage to France's support for their traditional enemy, the Algonquins. The Iroquois avoided pitched battles and instead favoured paddling down rivers on canoes to strike isolated villages and outposts far behind the French line, often at night.[240] Such asymmetric tactics – which the French labelled 'petite guerre' – would subsequently become a significant feature of the American Revolution of 1765-1783.[241]

The American Civil War of 1861-1865 witnessed the emergence of guerrilla-style tactics, which were employed by the *jayhawkers* pro-Union vigilante militia and Confederate *bushwhackers* in Kansas and Missouri.[242] Tactics and experience gained during the Civil War would also migrate to criminal gangs such as the Dalton Brothers, Reno Gang and personalities such as Jesse James, who himself had fought as a *jayhawker*.[243] These same themes would of course return in amplified forms during the 20th century, most noticeably following the outbreak of World War I. Famously, T.E. Lawrence 'of Arabia' and Arab fighters under the command of the Sheriff of Mecca and his son, Emir Faisal, employed offensive guerrilla tactics to pin down Ottoman formations, targeting infrastructure, cutting communication lines and destroying railways and bridges.[244] Indeed, World War I solidified an

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[238] Fabius' use of strategic patience and indirect encounters with the Carthagian army earned him the name of 'Cunctator' (delayer). P. Hunt, *Quintus Fabius Maximus Verrucosus, Roman Statesman and Commander*, Encyclopaedia Britannica, available online at: https://www.britannica.com/biography/Quintus-Fabius-Maximus-Verrucosus

[239] Sun Tzu (translated by Lionel Giles), *The Art of War*, New York: Dover Publications Inc., 2002, p. 56.

[240] Illustratively, one raid conducted in August 1689 involved a raiding party of 1500 Iroquois warriors aboard 150 canoes. See J.C. Castex, *Combats Franco-Anglais de la Guerre de Trente Ans (1618-1648) et de la Ligue d'Augsbourg (1688-1697)*, Vancouver: Les Editions du Phare-Ouest, 2012, pp. 203-207.

[241] See for example W. J. Eccles, *The Canadian Frontier, 1534-1760*, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983 p.122.

[242] T. O'Bryan, *Bushwhackers,* Civil War on the Western Border: The Missouri-Kansas Conflict:1854-1865*,* Kansas City Public Library, www.civilwaronthewesternborder.org/encyclopedia. For a more detailed analysis of civil war dynamics in Kansas, including the 'sacking' of Lawrence see J. M. McPherson, *Battle Cry Freedom: The Civil War Era*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988, pp.145-159.

[243] See Pinkerton: *Over 160 years of innovation: From Protecting Mid-Western Railways to Providing Corporate Risk Management to Clients Across the Globe*, www.pinkerton.com.

[244] This approach would later be codified by Lawrence in his seminal work, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1926), which *inter alia* highlighted the merits of incorporating guerrilla warfare within wider military offensives. See T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Chatham: Wordsworth, 1997. The text would influence future generations of strategists and insurgents. Additional insights into T.E Lawrence's psychology and philosophy on leadership and strategy are offered in Basil Liddell Hart's memoirs. See B. H. Liddell Hart, *Memoirs*, Volume I, London: Cassell, 1965, pp.345-349. See also P. Knightley and C. Simpson, *The Secret Lives of Lawrence of Arabia*, Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., Ontario, 1969, pp. 66-73 and M. Brown (ed.), *T.E. Lawrence in War and Peace: An Anthology of the Military Writings of Lawrence of Arabia*, London: Greenhill Books, 2005.

earlier historic trend in which non-state actors became formally included in states' campaigns plans, paving the way for the widescale incorporation of clandestine non-state partisans in the Allied war strategy during World War II.[245] By the onset of the Cold War, the stage was set for the rapid migration and spread of 'tried and tested' asymmetric warfare principles, methods and approaches to groups located around the world.

While observers such as Walter Laqueur have highlighted the influence of contextual factors such as culture, technology and geography in shaping actors' irregular (armed) campaigns,[246] the historical and theoretical literature recurrently points to common concepts, objectives and stratagems as constituting the bedrock of the clandestine playbook. These include avoiding direct confrontation with stronger (state) adversaries and carefully sequencing activities as part of longer-term campaigns of political influence ultimately aimed at unseating these same adversaries. Reflecting *inter alia* on France's experience of counter-insurgency warfare in the Algerian War,[247] David Galula argued in his seminal work *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (1964) that the strategies of guerrilla groups ultimately gravitated around challenging the local ruling power with a view to replacing that same power (including through the control of a territory's administration, police and armed forces).[248] Galula's thinking thus rested heavily on the notion of power contestation between opposing (state and non-state) factions. Paraphrasing von Clausewitz, he also posited that an insurgency would pursue its objectives "methodically, through a protracted struggle", using all available means: both violent and non-violent.[249] Revolutionary war, he concluded, had "its special rules, that differed from those of conventional war."[250] The inherent disproportion of strength between state and non-state actors could indeed be compensated for by a few critical asymmetric strategic advantages. These included the insurgent's ability to choose when to initiate conflict, sustain fluid as well as protracted campaigns ("insurgency is cheap, counter insurgency costly," he argued), and win-over the local population through his "ideological cause," ultimately separating the insurgency physically and morally from the state.[251]

Galula's writings both overlapped with and drew on concepts formulated by Mao Tse-tung, articulated in *On Guerrilla Warfare* (1937) and *On Protracted Warfare* (1967). The latter highlighted the value of small mobile units, securing base areas and employing hit and run tactics as a stepping stone to eventually operating as a larger, conventional force.[252] "We must strike the weak spots in the enemy's flanks, in his front [and] in his rear" he wrote, also emphasising the importance of waging war "everywhere" in order to cause the "dispersal of his forces and dissipation of his strength."[253] Mao's teachings were important in that they argued that offensive capabilities and tactics alone could not secure the ultimate success of a

[245] Such a logic was, to a lesser extent, also applied in the trenches of Europe, through Germany's development of a cadre of specially trained *Stormtrooper* 'shock' troops from 1915 onwards and the formation of elite Italian *Ardito* units in 1917 specialising in breaching enemy defences.
[246] W. Laqueur, *Guerrilla Warfare: A Historical and Critical Study* (first published 1976), New York: Routledge, 2018.
[247] France's war against the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN) escalated rapidly into urban warfare during the Battle of Algiers (1956-7). By the end of 1956, over half a million French troops were deployed in Algeria. The conflict ultimately resulted in Algeria's independence in 1962.
[248] D. Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1964, p. 3.
[249] Galula further suggested that there were three primary manifestations of non-state power-taking: revolution (or a sudden, explosive upheaval), plot (i.e., a coup d'état) and insurgency (or a protracted, methodical struggle). Ibid p. 3-4
[250] Ibid, p. x.
[251] Ibid, p. 5-9
[252] These documents outlined the tactics developed fighting both the Japanese and the Chinese Nationalists.
[253] M. Tse-tung, *On Guerrilla Warfare* (translated by S.B. Griffiths), 1961 In *'Mao Tse-tung on Guerrilla Warfare'*, FMFRP 12-18, US Marine Corps, 1989, p. 54.

rebellion. Instead, these had to be complemented by economic, social, psychological and above all, political, objectives and corresponding structures.[254] Echoing aspects of Clausewitz's notion of 'people's war', Mao famously stressed that securing popular consent for a rebellion was primordial and that the guerrilla's "relationship to the masses is that of the fish to the water."[255] Mao further expanded on these basic principles by outlining a sequenced, 'three phase' approach to guerrilla warfare. In the first 'strategic-defensive' phase, the guerrilla "retreated in space but advanced in time." This was to be followed by a 'strategic stalemate' phase focused on waging indirect guerrilla warfare and exhausting the enemy. Finally, a third 'strategic offensive' phase would involve an evolution to more conventional fighting following strategic gains by the guerrilla alongside the (political) control of territory.[256] Whilst largely consistent with Mao's writings, Galula nevertheless argued (with echoes of Sun Tzu) that the insurgent's transition to conventional warfare need not necessarily mark an end to the use of guerrilla tactics, positing that "revolutionary war remains unconventional until the end."[257]

This distinction between conventional and unconventional forms of warfare is explored in detail by Stephen Biddel who, in *Nonstate Warfare* (2021), builds on the concepts of earlier thinkers such as Charles Tilly by describing military conduct as occurring along a spectrum spanning from Fabian style irregular warfare to Napoleonic-style warfare featuring massed armies.[258] Biddel thus challenges the assumption that armed non-state actors can simply be characterised as waging "irregular warfare using lethal but militarily unsophisticated 'asymmetric' means" and state actors as capable of conducting "high-intensity, conventional combat [employing] large, uniformed, heavily armoured formations."[259] Instead, he argues that non-state armies may at times demonstrate the ability to fight more 'conventionally' than state armies, particularly when these benefit from higher levels of institutional maturity whilst conversely, state actors may resort to 'unconventional' methods at times of necessity.[260] "Real actors' actual military behaviour," Biddel adds, "is so interpenetrated by the intuitive elements of each as to make the distinction mostly misleading."[261] Critically, he also posits that the "scale of resources needed to wage state-like mid-spectrum warfare has now shrunk to the point where many non-state actors can fight effectively in this style – if their institutions are up to the job."[262]

Biddel's contribution to the debate is valuable, not least because it re-introduces the idea that there may be consistent forces at play – such as the internal cohesion and politics of any organisation (whether state or non-state) – that shape their strategic calculus and approach to war fighting. In doing so, he once again hints at the theme of non-sate actors demonstrating many of the characteristics of state behaviour, including the ability to combine different tactics and war fighting approaches. This last axiom was applied by the Vietnamese General Vo Nguyen Giap against the French during the First Indochina War and, subsequently, against

[254] J. Wong, *The Ties That Bind: Chairman Mao, Che Guevara and Al Qaeda*, Small Wars Journal, May 2016, pp.1-3.
[255] M. Y. M. Kau and J. K. Leung (eds.), *The Writings of Mao Zedong: 1949-1976: Volume I (September 1949 - December 1955)*, New York: M.E. Sharpe Inc., 1986, p. 632.
[256] See for example L. Katzenbach Jr. and G. Z. Hanrahanpp, *The Revolutionary Strategy of Mao Tse-Tung*, Political Science Quarterly Vol. 70, No. 3, The Academy of Political Science, September 1955, pp. 331-332.
[257] D. Galula, p. 11.
[258] S. Biddel, Nonstate Warfare: *The military Methods of Guerillas, Warlords, and Militias*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021, p. 7-12.
[259] Ibid, p. 2.
[260] Ibid, pp. 3-4.
[261] Ibid, p. 7.
[262] Ibid, p. 8.

the United States during the Vietnam War.[263] Here, and like Sun Tzu, Mao and T.E. Lawrence (whom he had diligently read), he effectively blended conventional and irregular tactics to suit the strategic circumstances in which he found himself at any given point.[264] Biddel's thinking also reinforces the argument that non-state actors are capable of developing sophisticated strategic postures – a position that echoes Lawrence Freedman's description of, this time, terrorism (as opposed to guerrilla warfare writ large) as going beyond a normative concept, and effectively amounting to a strategy that combines motives and the instrumental application of methods.[265]

Moving beyond the debate on 'forms' of warfare (i.e., conventional versus unconventional), analysis of both the theoretical literature and historical case studies highlights the extent to which public sentiment features perhaps disproportionally in the strategic outlook of armed non-state actors.[266] Scholars such as Patricia Hoffman, Ambreen Javed, Paul Staniland, as well as Dan Cox and Alex Ryan, have all to various degrees echoed Mao's idea of the guerrilla, insurgent or terrorist 'fish' swimming within a wider 'sea' of popular support and underlined the extent to which securing sympathetic constituencies often constituted the bedrock of armed non-state actor strategies.[267] Such a tenet is aptly summarised by John Mackinlay and Alison Al-Baddawy, who explain that such actors are "a product of an environment and population, and to be successful their modus operandi has to be continuously sympathetic to their surroundings."[268] The symbiotic relationship between clandestine non-state actors and their support base also introduces a variation on Biddel's concepts, namely that such actors may also be acting along a *political continuum* involving the creation and maintenance of constituencies spanning across the state–non-state divide. These same actors may thus choose to erect their own alternative governance systems or participate in formal political processes, such as by running for national elections (even, at times, whilst continuing to fight armed campaigns).[269] Indeed, such a strategic approach offers a pathway through which to transition from non-state to state-like morphologies short of overthrowing or supplanting the existing regime outright.

Manifestations and combinations of the above dynamics are discernible in organisations spanning across geographic and historical contexts. For example, the guerrilla's overall emphasis on securing popular support played heavily within the context of the Cuban Revolution, which, although dating back to 1956, remains striking to this day – not least given

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[263] The British, meanwhile, were also witnessing insurgent tactics within the context of the 1948-60 Malayan Emergency guerrilla war fought between the Communist Malayan National Liberation Army and the Commonwealth armed forces.

[264] Diep employed many aspects of conventional warfare against French General Navarre, including the coordinated use of artillery and (engineer) breaching parties. See for example P. B. Davidson, V*ietnam at War: The History, 1946-1975*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1991, pp. 223-234.

[265] L. Freedman, *Terrorism as a Strategy*, Government and Opposition, Vol.42, No.3, Special Issue on Politics in the Age of Terror, Summer 2007, pp. 314-339.

[266] There are, even here, exceptions. For example, some observers have argued that armed non-state actor groups relying on the extraction of local natural resources were less likely to cultivate supportive social and ethnic support bases. See J. M. Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2006.

[267] See P. D. Hoffman, *The Essentials of Guerrilla Warfare*, Air University Press, 2000; A. Javed, *Resistance and its progression to insurgency*, Institute of Strategic Studies (Islamabad), Vol. 30, No.1-2, Spring/Summer 2010, pp. 171-186; P. Staniland, *Organizing Insurgency: Networks, Resources, and Rebellion in South Asia*, International Security, Vol. 37, No. 1, Summer 2012, pp. 142-177; and D. G. Cox and A. Ryan, *Countering Insurgency and the Myth of "The Cause"*, Journal of Strategic Security, Vol. 8, No.1-2, Spring/Summer 2015, pp. 43-62.

[268] J. Mackinlay and A. Al-Baddawy, *'Successful Insurgencies and Counterinsurgencies'* in *Rethinking Counterinsurgency*, RAND Counterinsurgency Study Volume 5, 2008, p. 7.

[269] See for example M. S. Shugart, *Guerrillas and Elections: An Institutionalist Perspective on the Costs of Conflict and Competition*, International Studies Quarterly, Vol.3 6, No. 2, June 1992, pp. 121-151.

that it was initiated by a small band of fighters sailing from Mexico to Cuba across rough waters aboard an overcrowded motor cruiser.[270] Within days, most of the revolutionaries were killed by army patrols, leaving less than twenty fighters to spearhead a rural guerrilla campaign that lasted until 1958. During the latter, Ernesto 'Che' Guevara's application of *foco theory* (or *foquismo*) reflected Mao's emphasis on gaining the support of the rural population, whilst also highlighting the catalytic role of the guerrilla in igniting political uprisings.[271] In his 1960 treatise, *Guerrilla Warfare*, Guevara argued that all the necessary conditions for a revolution need not necessarily exist for a guerrilla campaign to succeed and that instead, these could be created by an insurrection led by a small vanguard of determined fighters.[272] An additional precedent set by Guevara was his determination to export *foquismo* after the Cuban Revolution, something he attempted in Congo and Bolivia.[273]

Vo Nguyen Giap expanded on this concept in Southeast Asia, concluding that success in protracted wars involving foreign powers required not only maintaining the support of the local population but also undermining that of a foreign actor's domestic population. Such wars, in other words, were not so much won or lost on the battlefield but instead through the adversary's ballot box, with its electorate ultimately constituting its 'centre of gravity'. Thus, whilst the 1968 Tet Offensive proved a military failure for the North Vietnamese, it did demonstrate that the Viet Cong was still a potent adversary capable of large-scale operations, further eroding American domestic support for what was proving to be an increasingly unpopular war.[274] Meanwhile, the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) similarly demonstrated the extent to which the notion of popular support could be widened to include multiple international audiences, diasporas and communities spanning across jurisdictions from the mid-1960s onwards. More localised examples of activities aimed at securing popular consent endure in contemporary contexts. For example, Sahelian extremist groups such as *Ansar al Din*, al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and *Jama'a Nusrat al Islam wa al Muslimeen* (JNIM, which evolved out of the al Qaeda franchise), have emphasised the delivery of basic public services and even building schools in northern Mali as a means of gaining the support of the local population.[275]

Organised crime actors, the theory suggests, similarly demonstrate an awareness of the social environment within which they operate, often attempting to secure localised support and/or

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[270] J. Gordon, *Twelve Who Made a Revolution*, Southern Review, Vol. 51, No. 4, Autumn 1966, pp. 340-349.

[271] The central principles of *foco* theory were developed by French intellectual Regis Debray, drawing on Che Guevara's revolutionary principles. See for example R. Blackburn (ed.), *Regis Debray: Strategy for Revolutio*n, London: Jonathan Cape,1970. For a detailed analysis of the role of other actors, including the *llano* (or urban underground), in the Cuban revolution see M.D. Childs, *An Historical Critique of the Emergence and Evolution of Ernesto Che Guevara's Foco Theory*, Journal of Latin American Studies Vol. 27, No. 3, Cambridge University Press, October 1995, pp. 593-624.

[272] E. Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1971, p.143.

[273] Mao himself labelled Che as an 'internationalist' when the two met in November 1960. "*Memorandum of Conversation between Mao Zedong and Ernesto 'Che' Guevara,"* November 19, 1960, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, PRC FMA 202-00098-01, pp. 1-14. Translated by Zhang Qian. http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115155.
Moreover, given his own experience of planning the overthrow of the Batista regime from Mexico alongside Fidel Castro, Guevara, an Argentinian, readily recognised the value of both foreign fighters and external sanctuaries as part of an armed campaign.

[274] The emphasis on demoralising and shaping the perceptions of foreign audiences would of course become a key tenet of more recent terrorist organisations such as al Qaeda and the Islamic State.
In his classic think piece, *Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars,* Andrew Mack connects this political focus to the mobilising power and increased cohesion of the insurgent, contrasted with that of those whom he is fighting. See A. Mack, *Why Big Nations Lose Small* Wars: The Politics of Asymmetric Conflict, World Politics, Vol. 27, Issue 2, January 1975, pp. 175-200.

[275] K. Zimmerman, *Salafi-Jihadi Ecosystem in the Sahel*, American Enterprise Institute, April 2020, pp. 2-5.

patronage amongst the population and political establishment. One set of early 1930s commentators thus pointed to the "alliances between those frowned upon by law and the allegedly respectable fold who profited from their misdeeds."[276] The economic character of the phenomenon implies that in many contexts (and particularly – but not exclusively – in lower income countries), local communities may directly benefit from or even actively depend on illicit commerce to meet their basic needs. Indeed, the connections between organised criminal groups and their environment are often deep-rooted and multifaceted, making it, as Regine Schönenberg and Annette von Schönfeld explain, "difficult to distinguish between light and shadow."[277] A recurrent characteristic of criminal actors thus consists of their ability to embed themselves within the social fabric in a way that extends across the state–non-state divide, including through their links to the political establishment. This approach reflects overlapping interests across the various social cleavages and 'stakeholders' (local communities, political elites and so on) with whom they interact.[278] Building on this theme, Louis Rawlings observes that "organised crime, when performed by the leaders of communities, tends to acquire the legitimacy of official policy."[279] Moreover, some theorists suggest that organised criminal actors show an acute propensity to exploit periods of political transition, including from authoritarian rule to multi-party democratic systems. As John Ishiyama notes, political parties during these periods require a combination of voter support and finances, whilst criminal actors reciprocally are in search of political patronage and protection.[280] In other words, criminal access to, or influence over, segments of the population constitutes a fundamental component of the political infiltration and 'state capture' process.

Illustrative cases of organised crime dependence on, or exploitation of, public support abound within the case study literature. In Colombia, Pablo Escobar famously encouraged the collusion of, and cultivated support amongst, local citizens by handing out cash to the poor as well as funding low-income housing in Medellin.[281] In Somalia, pirate gangs have over the years gained a degree of support and legitimacy with local clans, not only as an employer but also by protecting local communities from illegal fishing by foreign fleets trawling Somali waters.[282] Various observers have thus highlighted the extent to which the piracy phenomenon must be situated within the context of localised resistance to the loss of livelihood (both from illegal fishing and toxic dumping), and the extent to which the entire business model relies as much on local support and influence over governance systems as complex 'logistical tails' to homeports.[283] During the Covid-19 pandemic, elements of the Italian Mafia sought to build

[276] H. B. Chamberlin and W. B. Chamberlin, *Some Observations Concerning Organized Crime*, Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology (1931-1951), Vol. 22, No. 5, January 1932, p. 652.
[277] R. Schönenberg and A. von Schönfeld, *Introductio*n, in H. Böll-Stiftung and R. R. Schönenberg (eds.), *Transnational Organized Crime: Analyses of a Global Challenge to Democracy*, Transcript Verlag, 2013, p. 11.
[278] See for example: P. Miraglia *et al*., *Transnational Organised Crime and Fragile States*, International Center for the Prevention of Crime and the Clingendael Institute, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Paper WP 3/20212, October 2012, p.11.
[279] L. Rawlings, *Condottieri and Clansmen: Early Italian Raiding, warfare and the state*, In K. Hopwood (ed.), *Organized Crime in Antiquity*, Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2009, p. 97.
[280] J. Ishiyama, *Organized crime and political party systems characteristics in post-communist and Latin American countries*, Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties, Vol. 32, Issue 4, 2022, pp. 771-792. See also M. Di Cataldo and N. Mastrorocco, *Organized Crime, Captured Politicians, and the Allocation of Public Resources,* The Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization, Vol. 38, Issue 3, November 2022, pp. 774–839.
[281] See for example B. M. Bagley, *Colombia and the War on Drugs*, Foreign Affairs, Vol. 67, No. 1, Fall 1988, pp. 70-92.
[282] See R. Weitz, *Countering the Somali Pirates: Harmonizing the International Response*, Journal of Strategic Security, Vol. 2, No. 3, September 2009, pp. 1-12.
[283] See M.G. Frodl, Perils at Sea: Somali piracy tactics evolve; threats could expand globally, National Defence, Vol. 94, No. 677, April 2010, pp. 38-39; T. Keating, *The Political Economy of Somali Piracy*, The SAIS Review of International Affairs, Vol. 33, No. 1, Winter-Spring 2013, pp. 185-191; and A.

local legitimacy, support (and indeed leverage) by providing financial assistance such as micro-grants to struggling businesses.[284] In the Sahel, the ability of local criminal groups to marshal local political support and financing has arguably become a key feature of the overall political economy, with elements of the elite striking deals with these same groups as part of informal power sharing arrangements.[285]

Theorists have long debated the extent to which territorial control – or, at the very least, exploitation of vital terrain – constituted a central tenet of clandestine non-state actor strategic thinking. Dominic Johnson and Monica Toft, for example, argue that the concept of 'human territoriality' amounts to a fundamental evolutionary law that manifests itself in conflicts around the world, implying that this same law extends beyond the realm of state actors.[286] Toft also correlates territorial considerations – particularly the defence of self-defined (or, indeed, desired) 'homelands' – to the decision to employ violence as part of groups' overall strategies.[287] At the same time, Luis De la Calle and Ignacio Sánchez-Cuenca inject an interesting definitional dimension into the debate, suggesting that territorial control acts as the differentiator between insurgency and terrorism (the latter of whom may not have the capacity to hold the ground).[288] Even then, and echoing elements of both Mao and Bidell's thinking, Sankaran Kalyanaraman situates guerrilla and insurgent tactics within a phased warfighting logic that is primarily focused on loosening the state's authority rather than immediate territorial control (even if this constitutes the eventual political aim).[289]

Unsurprisingly, the role of territory, terrain and freedom of movement (a key by-product of these variables) comes across strongly in the historical analysis of clandestine non-state movements. In his account of guerrilla warfare movements, Robert Asprey points to the role of terrain in shaping generations of European partisan movements[290] – a theme perhaps best illustrated by the World War 2 French resistance, the *Maquis*, which was named after the scrublands in which fighters, or *Maquisards*, hid from the Germans.[291] Two decades later, the Vietnam War demonstrated the benefits of jungle environments and remote topographies by allowing Viet Cong guerrilla fighters to move in and out of battle, plan operations and establish critical supply and logistics lines. Chief amongst these was the Ho Chi Minh trail – a vast network of roads, footpaths and gasoline pipelines that spanned across Laos and Cambodia, once described by the US National Security Agency (NSA) as "one of the great achievements in military engineering of the twentieth century."[292] Today, terrain continues to be exploited

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Shortland and F. Varese, *The Protector's Choice: An Application of Protection Theory to Somali Piracy*, The British Journal of Criminology, Vol. 54, No. 5, September 2012, pp. 741-764.

[284] M. Johnson, *Italian mafia tightens grip on small businesses during lockdown*, Financial Times, 24 February 2021.

[285] See for example W. Lacher, *Organized Crime and Conflict in the Sahel-Sahara Region*, The Carnegie Papers, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, September 2012.

[286] D.D.P. Johnson and M. D. Toft, *Grounds for War: The Evolution of Territorial Conflict*, International Security, Vol. 38, No. 3, Winter 2013/14, pp. 7-38.

[287] See M. Toft, *The Geography of Ethnic Violence: Identity, Interests, and the Indivisibility of Territory*, Princeton (NJ): Princeton University Press, 2003.

[288] L. de la Calle and I. Sánchez-Cuenca, *Rebels without a Territory: An Analysis of Nonterritorial Conflicts in the World, 1970-1997*, The Journal of Conflict Resolution, Vol. 56, No. 4, August 2012, pp. 580-603.

[289] S. Kalyanaraman, Conceptualisations of Guerrilla warfare, Strategic Analysis, Vol. 27, No. 2, April-June 2002, pp. 172-185.

[290] R. B. Asprey, *War in the Shadows: The Guerrilla in History*, Volume 1, iUniverse, 2002, p.307

[291] See for example R. Balu, *French maquis during the Second World War, Irregular Combatants or part of the national army?* 20 & 21, Revue d'histoire, Vol. 141, No. 1, 2019, pp. 81-95.

[292] The network, according to Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) estimates, was used by the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) to carry around 630,000 soldiers, 400,000 weapons, 100,000 tons of food and 50,000 tons of ammunition to South Vietnam, forming a key component of its armed campaign. See '*Spartans in Darkness: American SIGINT and the Indochina War, 1945-1975*', National Security Agency Central Security Service, Series VI, Volume 7, CCH-E05-02-02, February 1998, p.94, declassified on 21 Dec 2007.

around the world by cross-border insurgencies, terrorist groups and criminal organisations. Examples include Boko Haram's safe-haven in the Sambisa Forest near the Nigerian-Cameroonian border; the use of old, mountainous smuggling trails connecting Afghanistan and Pakistan by drug traffickers; and the production and movement of cocaine by elements of the Colombian FARC under the cover of dense jungle canopy.[293]

Control of territory does not only constitute a war-fighting *means*, however (as is largely implied in the above examples), but also a strategic *end*, including as the basis for consolidating power and projecting this further afield. Some observers have in turn suggested that the *de facto* control of territory by clandestine non-state actors effectively points to a level of organisation (and, typically, corresponding administrative structures) that is in practice similar to that of states.[294] Such control also provides a means through which to formalise the relationship between non-state actors and local political constituencies. Whilst the aim of controlling territory may seem obvious within the context of armed insurgencies, guerrillas and terrorist groups seeking to overthrow or replace the existing political order, this is also highlighted as a regular feature of organised crime. Illustratively, Louis-Alexandre Berg and Marion Carranza argue that criminal violence and coercive activity is applied in a way that directly supports territorial gains.[295] However, as highlighted earlier in this thesis, the logic and definition of criminal control over territory is often more nuanced than that of traditional insurgencies or terrorist organisations, as this may instead be achieved through the 'indirect' methods of gradual co-option and systemic (economic and political) infiltration of societies.[296] Meanwhile, the work of scholars such as Gautam Basu on the concept of the 'virtual state' underpinned by globalisation as well as capital and information mobility once again re-introduces the question of whether definitions of both territorial and social control require expanding to include the digital and cyber realms.[297]

3.5 Conclusion

The critical review of the theoretical literature, supported by empirical analysis of real-world case studies, offers a number of insights that are of direct relevance to this thesis' research question. Going to the heart of the latter, the above analysis highlights the significant extent to which clandestine non-state actors of different denominations are both highly political in nature and, accordingly, bent on either challenging or co-opting the political status quo. Motivations for doing so and, subsequently, for justifying recourses to violent and criminal behaviours, are often anchored in prevailing grievances such as political marginalisation, social and/or economic inequality and perception of the state as being either illegitimate or unrepresentative. However, and extending beyond this, clandestine non-state actors may also be fuelled by expansionist as well as business ambitions, such as within the context of

[293] See for example: P.C. Aju and J.A. Aju, *Occupation of Sambisa Forest and Boko Haram Insurgency in Northeastern Nigeria as Security Threat and Challenges to Sustainable Forest Management*, Global Journal of Science Frontier Research: Agriculture and Veterinary, Vol. 18, Issue 5, Global Journals, 2018, https://globaljournals.org/GJSFR_Volume18/3-Occupation-of-Sambisa-Forest-and-Boko.pdf.
[294] See for example *Armed Non-State Actors: Current Trends & Future Challenges*, DCAF Horizon Working Paper No.5, 2012, p. 8, https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/144858/ANSA_Final.pdf; and A. I. Idler and J. J. Forest, *Behavioural Patterns among (Violent) Non-State Actors: A Study of Complementary Governance*, International Journal of Security & Development, Vol. 4, Issue 1, January 2015.
[295] L.A. Berg and M. Carranza, *Organized criminal violence and territorial control: evidence from northern Honduras*, Journal of Peace Research, Vol. 55, Issue 5, March 2018.
[296] See for example P. Williams, *Transnational Criminal Networks*, In J. Arquilla and D. Ronfeldt *(eds.)*, *Networks and Netwars: The Future of Terror, Crime, and Militancy*, RAND Corporation, 2001, pp. 61-98.
[297] G.K. Basu, Globalisation, *Virtualisation and Global Politics: A Critical Perspective*, The Indian Journal of Political Science, Vol. 62, No. 3, Special Issue on Globalisation and the State, September 2001, pp. 359-373.

securing control over new criminal markets. Clearly, even economic-expansionist aims carry a political dimension to the extent that these are often geared towards the projection of (ultimately) political power. Building on this dynamic, this chapter has demonstrated how the concept of spheres of influence, traditionally applied within the context of interactions between states, provides a helpful lens through which to understand how power and territorial dynamics can equally play out at the sub-state level. This also implies that structural reconfiguration occurs at this same level, with such a process essentially amounting to (re)shaping micro non-state 'orders'. Meanwhile, and supporting this thesis' first hypothesis, analysis of groups spanning across different geographic and historical contexts reveals their ability to both formulate clear policy choices and align these with tactical-level plans. These choices include whether to enter into partnerships and alliances, including as a means of projecting power at scale; whether to initiate violent or criminal campaigns; and whether to pursue or engage in political dialogue. As the analysis has shown, groups are also prone to adjusting their policy objectives and tactics in light of the evolving strategic context, territorial gains and/or in order to secure popular support. The specific ways in which groups of various denominations configure themselves structurally in pursuit of these same objectives is the topic that this thesis will now turn to.

CHAPTER 4 – Organisational structure

This second framework chapter focuses on the organisational and structural morphology of clandestine non-state actors – in effect the specific ways in which these protagonists configure themselves to project power, sometimes at scale. In doing so, it offers a means of further investigating this thesis' second hypothesis, which posits that clandestine non-state actors' organisational structures are both adaptive and shaped by similar considerations and factors, including the need to mitigate threats, such as disruption by state actors; the desire to exploit political and economic opportunities and relationships; and their individual ideology and strategic culture. To that end, the chapter starts by providing a synthesis of the various classifications, typologies and conceptual models that have been employed to describe clandestine non-state actors of different denominations before proposing an alternative ontology for categorizing groups. The chapter also explores the applicability of network theories, which have increased in popularity in the last two decades, to the object study and outlines how groups are prone to adaptation, sometimes growing into polymorphous entities. Finally, it describes how factors such as identity, membership and recruitment influence organisational design and composition.

The organisational structures and operating models of different clandestine non-state actors have been the subject of considerable academic research and discussion, both within the fields of criminology and security studies.[298] Unsurprisingly, structural comparisons between illicit and licit enterprises featured heavily in the early theoretical debate on organised crime. Thus, whilst Alfred L. Lindesmith suggested in the early 1940s that the criminal underworld was governed by its own set of rules that "set them apart from the rest of society" and broadly amounted to a system with its "own its own laws, […] methods and techniques, and specialized machinery," [299] other thinkers have instead suggested that its characteristics reflected the traditions of legitimate (i.e., licit) commerce.[300] For example, Thomas Schelling posited that like traditional businesses, organised crime existed because it met public demand for goods and services and relied on a customer base.[301] Similarly, Dwight C. Smith's 1980 illegal enterprise theory viewed criminal organisations through the lens of economic markets as "normal, rational, profit-oriented entrepreneurs," while echoing Schelling's description of a tendency for criminal businesses to seek monopolistic control over specific sectors such as production and distribution. [302] Although the debate endures, observers appear to at least broadly agree on the fact that the illicit and clandestine nature of criminal business introduces a requirement for specific structures and functions, including the ability to engage in acts of violence, that do not neatly fit into licit business models.[303]

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[298] Here, one cannot omit recognising the contributions of Carl von Clausewitz, the 19th century *doyen* of modern military strategic theory, who provided a model for understanding the main characteristics of *all* actors engaged in war by way of his 'trinity', comprising *reason*, *chance* and *passion*. Whilst primarily state-focused, the concept does allow for wider applicability by hinting at the need for specific attributes as a requirement for reaching political objectives such as leadership (effectively the application of *reason*); capabilities (the translation of opportunity, or *chance,* into gains); and popular support (in other words, mobilising *passion*). See C. von Clausewitz, *On War* (Translated by J.J. Graham), Chatham: Wordsworth Classics, 1997, p.24.

[299] A. L. Lindesmith, *Crime in the United States*, The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, Vol. 217, September 1941, p.1-19.

[300] See for example G. A. Antonopoulos and G. Papanicolaou, *Organized crime structures around the globe*, in *Organized Crime: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford Academic (online edition), February 2018.

[301] T. C. Schelling, *What is the Business of Organized Crime*?, The American Scholar, Vol. 40, No. 4, Autumn 1971, pp. 643-652.

[302] E. R. Kleemans in L. Paoli (ed.), p.35. See also D. C. Smith, *Paragons, Pariahs, and Pirates: A Spectrum-Based Theory of Enterprise*, Crime & Delinquency, Vol. 26, Issue 3, July 1980, pp.358-386.

[303] See for example P. Andreas and J. Wallman, *Illicit markets and violence: what is the relationship?*, Crime Law and Social Change, Vol. 52, March 2009, p.225.

Accordingly, analyses of criminal structures have therefore increasingly turned to conceptual frameworks that are more specific to illicit economic activity. In his classic book *Theft of the Nation* (1969), Donald Cressey thus spoke of clear hierarchies and divisions of labour within organised criminal groups,[304] shaping law enforcement's subsequent perception of the phenomenon.[305] More recent accounts offer greater flexibility and nuance, allowing for variation in structural configuration.[306] For example, thinkers such as Vy Le have attempted typologies of criminal organisations, distinguishing between hierarchical and horizontal groups as well as between organisations founded on cultural or ethnic connections and those that were a product of economic and market forces.[307] The likes of Dick Hobbs as well as Phil Williams and Roy Godson further highlighted what they perceived as the increasing characterisation of organised crime as a *social* system within the existing literature.[308] For Niles Breuer and Federico Varese, however, the structures and governance models of criminal groups varied primarily according to their aims and, more specifically, between financially and politically motivated groups.[309] Meanwhile, Paolo Campana points to a difference between substantive approaches that view criminal networks as a distinct form of organisation and instrumental methods emphasising networks and collections of nodes and attributes.[310] One example of a substantive model, protection theory – a strand heavily influenced by the historical study of the Mafia – describes the ways in which organised crime groups develop the capacity to provide a form of governance by taking over two traditional functions of the state: taxation and the monopoly over violence.[311] Taking more of a macro view, Klaus van Lampe therefore explains that on the whole, analyses of criminal groups tend to draw on five different levels of analysis: individuals, patterns of association, activities, overarching power structures and the legal/illegal nexus.[312]

Similar attempts at classifications can be found within the insurgency, militancy and terrorism literature. Illustratively, researchers such as Boaz Ganor,[313] Ariel Merari,[314] Alex Schmid[315] and Marc Sageman, [316] have commented to varying degrees on the operating models, internal processes and structural cohesion of these groups. Taken together, their analysis injects an

[304] M.E. Beare (ed.), p. xviii
[305] See for example J.S. McIllwain, *On the history, theory, and practice of organized crime: The life and work of criminology's revisionist "Godfather," Joseph L. Albini (1930-2013)*, Trends Organ Crim (2015) 18:12–40, 2015, pp.12-36.
[306] K. van Lampe, *'The interdisciplinary Dimensions of the Study of Organized Crime'*, in M.E. Bere (ed.), p. 81. See also M. D. Lyman *et al.* (eds), *Organized Crime (Fourth Edition)*, Upper Saddle River (NJ): Prentice Hall, 2007, p. 71.
[307] V. Le, *Organised Crime Typologies: Structure, Activities and Conditions*, International Journal of Criminology and Sociology, 2012 Vol. 1, pp. 121-131.
[308] D. Hobbs, *The Firm: Organisational Logic and Criminal Culture on a Shifting Terrain*, The British Journal of Criminology, Vol. 41, No. 4, Autumn 2001, pp.549-560; and P. Williams and R. Godson, Roy, *Anticipating organized and transnational crime, Crime*, Law and Social Change, Vol. 37, Issue 4, June 2002, pp.311-355.
[309] N. Breuer and F. Varese, *The Structure of Trade-type and Governance-type Organized Crime Groups: A Network Study*, *The British Journal of Criminology,* August 2022, pp.1-22.
[310] P. Campana, *Explaining criminal networks: Strategies and potential pitfalls*, Methodological Innovations, Vol. 9, 2016, pp.1-10.
[311] E. R. Kleemans in L. Paoli (ed.), p.36
[312] Van Lampe subsequently makes the case for considering an additional category – that of social construction. See K. van Lampe in M.E. Bere (ed.), p.85.
[313] B. Ganor, *Terrorist Organization Typologies and the Probability of a Boomerang Effect*, Studies in Conflict and Terrorism, Vol. 31, Issue 4, April 2008, pp.269-283.
[314] A. Merari, *Terrorism as a Strategy of Insurgency*, Terrorism and Political Violence, Vol. 5, No. 4, Winter 1993, pp.213-251.
[315] A. Schmid, *Frameworks for Conceptualising Terrorism*, Terrorism and Political Violence, Vol. 16, No. 2, Summer 2004, pp.195-221.
[316] M. Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004.

element of nuance into the commonly held assumption that groups will deliberately aim for flexible and devolved structural configurations from the outset. In a similar vein, Walter Enders and Todd Sandler argue that the organisational structures of groups tend to evolve over time, gradually morphing from hierarchical organisations featuring clear chains of command to more diffused models in an attempt to plug vulnerabilities and avoiding compromise.[317] According to Bruce Hoffman, internal structures and decision-making processes are shaped by the attitudes of a group's leadership, with these same attitudes also determining the allocation and application of capabilities and resources within an organisation.[318] Drawing on rational choice theory, Scott Helfstein suggests that the structures of terrorist groups are prone to the kind of cost-benefit considerations and bureaucratic forces "that impact all purposeful organisations."[319] In a variation on this theme, Ayse Zarakol provides a broad distinction between terrorist organisations that are 'system affirming' (supporting an established order or paradigm) and those that are 'system-threatening' (challenging existing paradigms), with the implication being that a group's overall strategic positioning is also likely to influence its internal and structural mechanics.[320] According to Victor Asal and Karl Rethemeyer, the potency and structural characteristics of these groups are instead largely dependent on a number of key and recurring conditions, such as the extent to which these benefit from strategic backing from states, territorial control and a permissive political and operating environment.[321]

Beyond the theoretical debate, analysis of clandestine organisations throughout the ages highlights the ways in which organisational structures reflect a combination of both a group's strategic goals *and* the political environment (or, indeed, the social and cultural 'ecosystem' from which they emerge and in which they operate). Illustratively, the structure of subversive or insurgent movements seeking to replace existing governments will typically include clearly delineated functions such as social services, the provision of justice, armed activity and economic policy as the means of bringing coherence and specialism to their application of force.[322] This pattern is observable in groups spanning from traditional anti-colonial and national liberation movements to contemporary organisations such as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and Boko Haram. Organised criminal groups, meanwhile, tend to adopt structures that are more akin to those of financial markets, with different sectors of activities focused on functions such as commodity production, transport, protection and money laundering. Perhaps for this reason, criminal kingpins may at times bear a closer resemblance to business executives than to statesmen. Naturally, groups may also adopt hybrid structures configured around multiple (and even competing) objectives as was the case with the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) when it deepened its involvement in the cocaine trade at the same time as pursuing its revolutionary aims, or with the Taliban, which drew significant financial resources from the opiate economy during its twenty-year war against NATO and the Afghan state.

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[317] W. Enders and T. Sandler, *The Political Economy of Terrorism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp.238-268.
[318] B. Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (Revised Edition), New York: Columbia University Press, 2006.
[319] S. Helfstein, *Governance of Terror: New Institutionalism and the Evolution of Terrorist Organizations*, Public Administration Review, Vol. 69, No. 4, July-August 2009, pp.727.
[320] See A. Zarakol, *What makes terrorism modern? Terrorism, legitimacy, and the international system*, Review of International Studies, Vol. 37, Issue 5, December 2011, pp.2311-2336.
[321] V. Asal and R. K. Rethemeyer, *The Nature of the Beast: Organizational Structures and Lethality of Terrorist Attacks*, The journal of Politics, Vol. 70, No. 2, University of Chicago Press, April 2008, pp. 437-449.
[322] For example, the 'Office of Services' (Maktab al-Khidmat, or 'MAK') that acted as the incubator for al Qaeda (headquartered in Peshawar during the 1980s) had clear structures in place for both recruiting new members and for collecting far-ranging donations from wealthy Gulf-based individuals, Islamic charities and the Saudi Intelligence Services. See A. McGregor, *Jihad and the Rifle Alone: 'Abdullah' Azzam and the Islamist Revolution*, Journal of Conflict Studies, Vol. 23, No. 2, February 2006.

The structures of clandestine organisations are often (once again) heavily determined by whether they are able to control territory, at which point they will inevitably need to erect formalised governance structures that may not have been previously required in, for example, the conduct of guerrilla warfare.[323] Thus, ISIS established a structure comprising of *Wilayat* ('provinces' or 'states'), each with their own governor as well as local, and at-times-cumbersome, bureaucracy.[324] The organisation also developed a relatively complex system of administrative departments and councils responsible for activities such as religious outreach (*Da'wa*), military affairs and public information as well as courts and law enforcement arms such as the infamous *Hisba* religious police.[325] This approach resembled Al Shabaab's system of Islamic governance in which controlled regions were administered by local governors under the authority of the organisation's executive *shura* (governing council) and where justice was provided through district level courts overseen by a cadre of judges (*Qaali*).[326] Conversely, organisations who do not have the ability to directly control the ground or territory may need to conduct their political, armed or criminal business activities whilst retaining a high degree of secrecy, or at least concealment from stronger or competing actors such as government actors, external interveners and rival factions. Formal and hierarchical structures in such contexts are often avoided, with more discreet, fluid (such as cell-type) structures being favoured instead. These organisations therefore tend to be more devolved and self-sufficient, with a greater ability to take decisions locally. Such structures offer both advantages and disadvantages: on the one hand they can offer greater agility and reduce vulnerability to disruption; on the other, they also make strategic campaigns more difficult to control and deliver. This latest challenge, in turn, further explains why organisations that are able to make consistent political, territorial or economic gains ultimately veer towards more consolidated and integrated structures.[327]

At the same time however, the idea that the structural and ontological properties of organisations automatically correspond to a fixed pattern or typology has been disputed. For example, speaking about organised crime groups, Petrus van Duyne argues that "networks appear to be too heterogeneous to allow a single theoretical umbrella" and that therefore, "proper, valid operationalisation from which also a typology must be deduced, is in principle impossible."[328] Van Lampe agrees, adding that measurements of organised crime differ depending on whether these are conducted through the lens of illegal markets (specifically, the provisions of goods and services), criminal structures (considering factors such as the composition and size of criminal groups) or systemic conditions such as power structures,

[323] Examples include ISIS during the height of its rule, al Shabaab, Hamas, Hezbollah and the Taliban following the recapture of Kabul in August 2021 as well as historic guerrilla groups such as the Viet Cong and Cuban revolutionaries.
[324] One of the advantages of this governance model was that it could also be applied to geographically dislocated wilayas as far away as Libya, Algeria and Afghanistan. See J. Stern and J.M Berger, p. 51. See also K. Bauer (ed.), *Beyond Syria and Iraq: Examining Islamic State Provinces*, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Washington DC, 2016, pp.15-40.
[325] See for example C. C. Caris and S. Reynolds, *ISIS Governance in Syria*, Institute for the Study of War, Washington DC, 2014, pp.15-17.
[326] S. J. Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Islamist Group*, 2005-2012, London: Hurst & Company, 2013, pp.83-90.
[327] See for example E. Frisch, *Insurgencies are Organizations Too: Organizational Structure and the Effectiveness of Insurgent Strategy*, Peace & Conflict Review, Vol. 6, Issue 1, 2011, p.3. A variation on this theme can be observed within the context of criminal organisations in Colombia throughout the 1980s and 1980s and Mexico in the early 2000s. Here, the ability to control ground and markets as well as co-opt legitimate institutions has historically resulted in the 'cartelisation' of organisations – or a propensity towards more hierarchical and vertically integrated structures. Arguably however, it has also increased the profile of individual leaders and kingpins, making them more vulnerable to law enforcement operations.
[328] P. C. van Duyne *et al.*, p.8.

including corrupt relationships between criminals and public officials.[329] Similarly, agreement (still) has not been reached on the extent to which terrorism largely amounts to an overarching strategic label under which different types of organisational structures can be placed or whether it merely constitutes a tactic that can therefore be harnessed by a myriad of actors – insurgent, guerrilla or criminal – regardless of their structural composition. [330] On a similar tack, Arquilla and Ronfeldt discuss the increasing coalescence of different types of groups as "blended, [...] sprawling multi-hub and spider's-web networks,"[331] whilst Makarenko speaks of a "crime-terror continuum" or "nexus" in which terrorist groups may embark on or associate with criminal enterprises (and vice versa), at times leading to convergence and/or the adoption of new functions and objectives.[332]

4.1 Flexible paradigms and network theory

Given these typological and structural categorisation challenges, there is value in exploring the applicability of wider (and more flexible) theoretical concepts and paradigms of relevance to the object of study, allowing the observer to veer away from templated and pre-packaged descriptions of organisational characteristics. Illustratively, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *assemblage* theory suggests that there is no fixed ontology for the social world but that instead, social formations constitute assemblages (effectively patchworks) made up of a multitude of overlapping configurations. Social entities, according to the theory, are therefore both fluid and heterogeneous, as well as in a state of continuous transition and movement.[333] Such a paradigm is helpful in terms of accounting for the polymorphous nature of clandestine groups, ever adapting in the face of new opportunities and constraints. Of course, whilst the theory provides a significant degree of relativist flexibility, its strength is also its weakness insofar as it is both indefinite and overly *sui generis*, complicating the task of comparing the properties and behaviour of different entities.[334] Perhaps more helpful, therefore, is *network theory*, which offers the dual advantage of describing the structural dynamics of social groupings whilst at the same allowing for a significant of degree of flexibility.

Network theory provides a useful tool for the observer of social groupings by offering a means of representing the relations that exist within – as well as between – different entities. The sociologist Manuel Castells famously introduced the notion of a 'networked society' in which social networks enabled by communication technologies constituted "the new social morphology of our societies," fundamentally modifying "processes of production, experience, power and culture."[335] Other scholars further expanded on this thinking, pointing to the propensity for clandestine networks to develop external partnerships – not least, as Carlo

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[329] K. von Lampe in P. C. van Duyne *et al*., p.86.

[330] This complexity already became apparent during the early 1970s when Illich Ramirez Sanchez – Aka 'Carlos the Jackal' – carried out a series of terrorist attacks as a sole entrepreneur on behalf of Palestinian organisations. See J. Burke, *How cold war spymasters found arrogance of Carlos the Jackal too hot to handle*, The Guardian, September 6, 2020.

[331] J. Arquilla and D. Ronfeldt (eds.), p.xi.

[332] This, she suggests, explains why terrorist organisations may 'drift' into criminality, even whilst retaining a political facade. See *The Crime-Terror Continuum: The case of the Andean region***,** Global Affairs and Strategic Studies, University of Navarra, July 13, 2020**,** https://www.unav.edu/web/global-affairs/detalle/-/blogs/the-crime-terror-continuum-the-case-of-the-andean-region**.**

[333] M. DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity*, London: Continuum, 2006, p.142.

[334] See D. Little, '*Assemblage Theory'*, Understanding Society, November 15, 2012, https://understandingsociety.blogspot.com/2012/11/assemblage-theory.html.

[335] According to Castells, such a networked society also provided the backbone for the global criminal economy, allowing criminal organisations to collaborate and access new markets in unprecedented ways. See M. Castells, *An Introduction to the Information Age*, in S. Thornham *et al*. (eds), *Media Studies: A reader (3rd Edition)*, New York, New York University Press, p.151. See also S. Lindgren, *Digital Media and Society*, London: Sage Publications, 2017, p.98.

Morselli explains, because "the covert settings that surround [them] call for specific interactions and relational features within and beyond the network."[336] Reminiscent of *assemblage theory*, network-based paradigms reintroduce the idea that specific social groupings (such as expertise or specialist know-how contained within tightly clustered pockets of activity) may in fact act as the constituent parts of *multiple* organisations or networks. Observers have also highlighted the fundamental adaptability and resilience of social networks born out of their ability to make different connections, absorb new information and cope with change as complex (social) systems.[337]

The logic of distributed, interconnecting networks introduces an additional concept in the form of *systems theory*, a body of thinking that examines the way in which different spatially delimited components interact with one another as part of a complex – and, typically, continuously adapting – 'system of systems.'[338] Such thinking offers distinct benefits when applied to the study of social entities, including the possibility of viewing organisations as the product of, as well as operating in, different socio-political, informational and economic environments and ecosystems. Interactions can also occur *between* environments, with knowledge, ideas, capital, and goods flowing between them. The ability to view social organisations as political and social ecosystems is helpful to the study of clandestine non-state actor organisations as it offers and alternative framework for conceptualising forms of political organisation; one that does not automatically revolve around the notion of the (nation) state but instead allows for the existence of smaller political entities that engage in relations with one another, including across geographical divides. Such theories also introduce the closely related notion of diffused 'networks of networks,' where different organisations, geographical hubs, centres of expertise and specialist functions are all once again interconnected in a wider system comprising a myriad of dynamic transactions and relationships. These same interactions are in turn increasingly global in nature, facilitated by modern day technology and hyper-connectivity. Critically, such an idea therefore also allows for conceptualising an alternative (non-state) international 'system' based on these different non-state structural configurations and relationships.

4.2 Operating models

Beyond the broad conceptual models outlined above, and whilst reemphasising some of the inherent risks and challenges associated with typologies, the examination of case study data relating to the structural design of different clandestine groups nevertheless points to at least four broad categories of operating models employed by organisations around the world. These can be broadly categorised as 'hub and spoke'; 'franchise'; 'clan'; and 'market-based' (hybrid variations between these are also possible). This classification, as well as corresponding characteristics, strengths and weaknesses is briefly summarised in Table 1 (below) before being described in more detail, drawing on illustrative examples.

[336] G. Bichler, A. Malm, & T. Cooper, *Drug supply networks: a systematic review of the organizational structure of illicit drug trade*, Crime Sci, 6:2, January 2017, p.3.
[337] See for example W. W. Powell, *Neither Market nor Hierarchy: Network Forms of Organization*, Research in Organizational Behaviour (12), January 1990, pp.295-336; and T. Carmichael and M. Hadzikadic, *The Fundamentals of Complex Adaptive Systems*, June 2019, pp.1-16.
[338] See for example C. Fuchs, *Transnational space and the 'network society'*, Twenty-First Century Society, Vol. 2, Issue 1, 2007, pp.49-78.

Structural category	Characteristics	Strengths	Weaknesses
Hub and spoke	Overall control and coordination function exercised by central entity, node or actor with clear authority over different branches or sections of the organisation.	Strong cohesion, high level of efficiency and ability to vertically integrate multiple sectors and functions under one organisation. Generally effective at generating profit or raising funds.	Reliance on central command and control and overall authority makes such organisations vulnerable to disruption and leadership targeting.
Franchise	Delegated authority, with devolved cells or members operating under the broad banner of pre-packaged brands, ideas, and structures that can be readily applied in different contexts.	Ability to rapidly establish presence in new geographic areas through new partnerships and projecting the perception of significant strategic influence. Means of securing new financial resources.	Difficult to control different franchise subsidiaries, who may have competing objectives or join out of opportunism. Members may be associated with losses or splintering elsewhere.
Clan	Built around family, ethnic, nationality or tribal linkages. Local and/or cultural norms and codes shaping organisational structure and operating model.	Typically benefit from high levels of secrecy and loyalty, reducing the risk of infiltration. Tend to benefit from a reputation for trust and efficiency.	Harder to secure cutting-edge expertise and expand into new strategic locations that do not benefit from existing diaspora links.
Market-based	Typically smaller, specialised groups organised around specific services or functions that fit within a wider system or supply chain, such as smuggling, manufacturing, logistics or finance.	Can maximise operating efficiency and profit by providing services to multiple 'customers' including some of the other categories of clandestine non-state actors.	Often limited in their ability to grow beyond their immediate area of expertise or 'added value,' although some groups have successfully evolved into larger multi-function organisations.

Table 3: Broad classification of clandestine non-state actor organisations.

'**Hub and spoke'** operating models are characterised by a direct control and coordination function exercised by a central node or actor over periphery groups or cells located in separate geographical locations. Examples of groups that fall within this category are varied but tend to be either historical or those that emerged in (and have in turn survived since) the mid to late twentieth century. World War II clandestine agents who worked in occupied Europe and reported to Special Operations Executive (SOE) controllers in London and elsewhere set a strong precedent for this operating model, which was employed at scale within the context of proxy-warfare during the Cold War. Terrorist and subversive networks have also at different times resorted to such models, as in the case of the European leftist groups of the 1970s and 1980s or that of the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA).[339] Perhaps because of its four decade-long lifespan, Hezbollah also fits within this category – one of the clearest current examples of such an organisational model. Despite being headquartered in and conducting planning from Lebanon, the organisation directly oversees cells (including sleeper operatives), training teams and fundraising missions globally, demonstrating the ability to direct and deploy resources at scale in key political theatres such as Syria.[340]

[339] See for example: J. Horgan and M. Taylor, *The provisional Irish republican army: Command and functional structure*, Terrorism and Political Violence, Vol. 9, No. 3, 1997, pp.1-32
[340] *'Hezbollah'*, Center for International Security and Cooperation (CISAC), Stanford, August 2016, available online at: https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/hezbollah

Organised crime examples of hub and spoke organisations include some of the more traditional, vertically integrated cartels of the Colombian cocaine-trafficking 'golden era' which directly 'owned' and oversaw the activities of multiple sectors (production, wholesale distribution and transport) from 'headquarter' locations such as Medellin. Similarly, the various branches of the Thieves in Law (or *vory-v-zakone)*, a syndicate harking back to Stalin-era Gulags, are run by supervising groups of powerful *Pakhan* bosses with close links to large businesses leaders and the political elite in Russia and Central Asia.[341] It is perhaps unsurprising that modern 'hub and spoke' organisations – including both Hezbollah and Russian organised crime syndicates – often benefit from the protection of state actors or the elite, reducing what would otherwise be a clear vulnerability in the form of their central nodes. Illustratively, Hezbollah's ability to directly coordinate and fund overseas cells as well as retain fighters 'on the books' over long periods of time is in no small part a product of its close relationship with and significant support from Iran. Russian organised crime, meanwhile, has effectively percolated through the higher echelons of the state, a phenomenon that took place within the context of post-Soviet Union privatisation, shielding criminal enterprises by way of patronage and protective *Krysha* (roofs).[342]

'Franchises', meanwhile, have emerged as a highly popular and effective mechanism for developing a wide international footprint via delegated authority. This category typically consists of pre-packaged brands, ideas and structures that can be readily introduced into a range of new contexts. Even here, the rigidity of the guidance provided to affiliates across the international network will vary. On the more stringent end of the spectrum are organisations that articulate clear expectations on the laydown of the organisations within the franchise. The Hells Angels Motorcycle Club (HAMC), for example, combines a culture of empowering local branches – so-called 'chapters' – with a standard, almost constitutional, carbon copy template for administration set out in its manifesto: the HAMC World Rules.[343] Specifically, local chapters each have their own president, vice president and administrative positions, emulating the club's founding chapter in San Bernardino, California.[344] The chapters – which cover 59 countries worldwide – are also expected to follow a form of direct democracy where members can vote both on group decisions and to elect leadership figures.[345] In addition to the president (who nevertheless holds the power of veto over group decisions) and vice-president, key positions also include a treasurer overseeing finances, a sergeant-at-arms responsible for enforcing discipline and a road captain in charge of organising motorcycle runs and group events. Furthermore, the biker gang demonstrates the way in which franchise organisations may still retain the ability to establish higher-level (or supra) governance mechanisms: different chapters are grouped into regions represented by their own executive body and whose representatives are elected from individual chapters.[346]

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[341] The notion of central leadership has more commonly evolved into the term *avtoritet* (authority) within the context of modern Russian organised crime. See also T*reasury Targets the "Thieves-in-Law" Eurasian Transnational Criminal Organization, Office*, U.S. Department of the Treasury Press Release, December 22, 2017, https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm0244.

[342] S. Cheloukhine, *The roots of Russian organized crime: from old-fashioned professionals to the organized criminal groups of today*, *Crime Law Soc Change* 50, 2008, pp. 353–374.

[343] '*Three Members Of Modesto Hells Angels, Including Vice President And Secretary, Indicted For Firearm And Drug Offenses'*, U.S. Attorney's Office, Department of Justice, Eastern District of California, https://www.justice.gov/usao-edca/pr/three-members-modesto-hells-angels-including-vice-president-and-secretary-indicted-0.

[344] See for example R.S. Barger with K. Zimmerman, *Hell's angel: The life and times of Sonny Barger and the Hell' Angels Motorcycle Club*, Harper Collins Publishers Inc., New York, 2000.

[345] A. De Amicis, *Hell's Angels Criminal Enterprise*, Pittsburgh, NCJ 228801, August 2009, p. 20, accessed via the National Criminal Justice Reference System (NCJRS), https://www.ncjrs.gov/App/Publications/abstract.aspx?ID=250828. See also According to the Hells Angels website: http://hells-angels.com/.

[346] J. Carasiti, *Hell's Angels Organisation Attributes Review*, Ridgway Research, May 2011, pp. 2-4.

Franchises can also take on a much less templated form, including loose constellations of 'start-up' groups who may bear little resemblance to one another or to the original parent movement. This category includes many of the organisations who over the last two decades have rebranded themselves or declared allegiance to al Qaeda and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Such groups may rename themselves in a relatively *ad hoc* manner and without necessarily obtaining the direct consent of the original leadership. Reasons for doing so are varied: to increase publicity; to draw in new recruits; as a result of splintering; or as a means of drawing resources (such as material and training) from the parent organisation. In the case of a number of groups in North Africa, the Sahel and West Africa, rebranding from previous, more localised names to al Qaeda and ISIS-variants offered a means of 'jumping on the bandwagon' and being associated with what was proving to be two popular brands. Thus, the Algerian Group Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat (GSPC) rebranded itself as al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in 2006, adopting a localised structure organised around *katiba* (brigades) and *sariya* (companies) that enabled it to better infiltrate communities in northern Mali, Niger, and southern Algeria.[347] Similarly, a faction of the Nigerian Boko Haram insurgency adopted the new name of Islamic State in West Africa (ISWA) in 2015 [348] – a decision that sparked some surprise amongst commenters given the organisation's previous efforts to receive financial support, weapons and training from al Qaeda (and therefore demonstrating a propensity towards opportunism).[349]

Once again, the decision to join a franchise carries both strategic benefits and drawbacks. For starter-cells, lone wolves and local armed groups, renaming or rebranding oneself as a member an existing transnational franchise can project an image of success and influence that strengthens the overall brand of an organisation. At the same time, they may also be associated with defeats or losses suffered elsewhere. Moreover, franchise structures can complicate the decision-making process of the original parent organisation, who may at times disapprove of the creation and/or activities of new branches. For example, al Qaeda core, disapproved of al Qaeda in Iraq's (AQI) tactics and blanket use of violence against civilians. Even here, however, certain strategic principles relating to organisational culture can still be articulated by the parent organisation in a way that can be applied by different parts of the franchise, such as al Qaeda's a 'general policy' guidance available to new branches[350] and universally applicable advice such as "abundance in consultation followed by determination without hesitation" when acting.[351]

'Clan'-type operating models are those that revolve around family, ethnic, nationality or tribal networks. Specific to these is an adherence to local or cultural norms and codes that are, in turn, woven into the fabric of their structure and operating model. Such organisations can be found across the spectrum of organisations but are particularly favoured by criminal groups such as ethnic Albanians and Nigerian groups and, perhaps above all, by the Italian Mafia. The latter's Calabrian 'Ndrangheta branch, for example, is composed of closely knit sub-groups specific, called *ndrine*, that are specific to a local territory, and which consist primarily of members of the same family.[352] Japanese Yakuza crime syndicates, meanwhile, follow a

[347] K. Zimmerman, *Salafi-Jihadi Ecosystem in the Sahel*, American Enterprise Institute, April 2020, p. 2.
[348] See for example J. Schanzer, *Al-Qaeda's Armies, Middle East Affiliate Groups & Next Generation of Terror*, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2005. pp. 99-105.
[349] *Letter from Abdallah Abu Zayd Abd-al-Hamid to Abu Musab Abd-al-Wadud*, Bin Laden's Bookshelf, Office of the Director of National Intelligence, Declassified January 19, 2017, https://www.dni.gov/index.php/features/bin-laden-s-bookshelf?start=1.
[350] *Gist of Conversation - October 2011*, Bin Laden's Bookshelf, Office of the Director of National Intelligence, Declassified May 20, 2015, p. 3.
[351] *Letter on Shura*, Bin Laden's Bookshelf, Office of the Director of National Intelligence, Declassified January 19, 2017.
[352] F. Calderoni, *The Structure of Trafficking Mafias: the 'Ndrangheta and cocaine*, Crime Law Soc Change (58), September 2012, pp. 321–349.

model where localised and tightly controlled clan-like groups effectively take over the mantel of the family, expecting full loyalty from their members. Variations of this example within the context of terrorist and insurgent organisations include al Shabaab (which is literally configured around the Somali clan system) and the Haqqani network – a movement that has drawn heavily on family and tribal affiliations in northwest Pakistan and eastern Afghanistan.[353] Clan-based models offer a range of organisational structural advantages. They are geared towards maximising loyalty and secrecy, and their highly devolved, almost cellular-like characteristics offer opportunities for exporting their operating model into new territories. At the same time of course, their insular (and often traditional) character may stifle innovation as well as their ability to bring in external knowledge and recruits.

'**Market-based'** networks tend to be organised around – or connected by – specific services or functions within a wider system, network or supply chain. These include organisations focused on professional, 'value added' activities, products and solutions within illicit economies: drug producers (including laboratory technicians), precursor chemical importers, money launderers and so on. Some of these organisations may specialise in individual services – as may be the case with highly potent methamphetamine produced in Dutch processing laboratories – whereas others may combine multiple functions within a more vertically integrated structure. Moreover, some actors will offer logistical or other services to a range of clients as may be the case with cross-border smugglers (in the Sahel, for example) who may at different times carry contraband for criminal organisations or weapons for insurgent and terrorist groups.[354] A variation on this 'multiple customer' theme are some of the so-called financial controllers (essentially high turn-over money launders) operating in Dubai on behalf of a wide pool of clandestine clients.[355] Taken together, the plethora of actors engaging in market-determined systems and (illicit) economies arguably amount to diffused as well as distributed networks whose connections are predicated primarily on trade, mutual benefit and financial interactions. Even though trust can and does play an important role in such relationships, these therefore remain primarily transactional in nature.

4.3 Identity, membership and recruitment

Revisiting a now familiar theme, Galula once commented that "the insurgent cannot seriously embark on an insurgency unless he has a well-grounded cause with which to attract supporters," adding that "a cause [...] is his sole asset at the beginning, and it must be a powerful one if the insurgent is to overcome his weakness.[356] To be sure, traditional analyses of non-state actor movements typically placed a heavy emphasis on the 'cause', which, in turn, was largely treated as synonymous with group ideology and identity. However, such terminology has also proven problematic. For example, John Gerring's study of different definitions of ideology highlights the existence of contradictory premises: "to some ideology is dogmatic, while to others it carries connotations of political sophistication; to some it refers to dominant modes of thought and to others it refers primarily to those most alienated by the status quo."[357] Willard A. Mullins similarly argued as early as the 1970s that the term's ambiguity limited its value as an analytical concept.[358] Moreover, a growing body of evidence

[353] See for example: *Haqqani Network*, Mapping Militant Organisations, Centre for International Security and Cooperation, Stanford University, 2018, https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/haqqani-network.
[354] S.B. Gaye, *Connections between Jihadist groups and smuggling and illegal trafficking rings in the Sahel,* Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Peace and Security Series No. 29, Centre of Competence Sub-Saharan Africa, 2018.
[355] See also section on clandestine finance.
[356] D. Galula, p. 10.
[357] J. Gerring, *Ideology: A Definitional Analysis*, Political Research Quarterly (University of Utah), Vol. 50, No. 4, December 1997, pp. 957-994.
[358] W. A. Mullins, *On the Concept of Ideology in Political Science*, American Political Science Review, Vol.66, Issue 2, June 1972, pp. 498-510.

produced over the last three decades highlights the extent to which both 'causes' and ideologies may fluctuate over time or give way to more pragmatic or opportunistic considerations.[359] There also appears to be a broad consensus on the fact that motivations for joining clandestine organisations vary significantly between individuals and micro-contexts, going beyond a single unifying ideological cause.[360]

Perhaps for these reasons, scholars have, over the years, turned increasingly to the concepts of *discourse* (as proposed by Foucault) and *narrative* to describe the process of constructing a system of knowledge as well as framing, interpreting and attributing meaning to lived experience in a way that resonates with different audiences.[361] Unsurprisingly, narratives often tend to draw on and highlight a combination of underlying grievances, basic individual needs and common vulnerabilities such as political, religious or ethnic exclusion; a lack of access to economic opportunities; or the absence of social justice more broadly.[362] Only then will they typically (as we have already seen) formulate 'policy positions' on key issues such as the legitimacy of violence in a way that builds on the initial diagnosis.[363] The interpretive process through which narratives are constructed is important as indeed, it assigns negative, positive, or neutral values to specific issues, thus producing a system or framework of belief.[364] Having explained 'why things are the way they are' (the problem) alongside broader aims (the solution), ideological narratives also often provide an 'offer' or manifesto, which clarifies how those who subscribe to the rules and tenets of that same ideology stand to gain: the *quid pro quo* of what essentially amounts to a social contract.

Manifestos and their underlying ideological premises are often (although not always) anchored in and legitimised by existing, 'off the shelf' scriptures and manuscripts as well as theological

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[359] See for example J. E. Ugarriza and M. J. Craig, *The relevance of Ideology to Contemporary Armed Conflicts, A Quantitative Analysis of Former Combatants in Colombia*, Journal of Conflict Resolution, Vol.57, No.3, June 2013, pp. 445-477.

[360] See for example F. Calderoni *et al*., *Recruitment into organised criminal groups: a systematic overview*, Trends & issues in crime and criminal justice, No. 583, Australian Institute of Criminology, January 2020, pp. 1-27.

[361] See S. Miller, *Foucault on Discourse and Power*, Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory, No.76, October 1990, pp.115-125; T. Purvis and A. Hunt, *Discourse, Ideology, Discourse, Ideology, Discourse, Ideology...*, The British Journal of Sociology 44, No. 3, September 1993, pp. 473-499; and S. R. Shenhav, *Political Narratives and Political Reality*, International Political Science Review, Vol. 27, No. 3, July 2006, pp. 245-262.
James Smith takes this notion one step further through his exploration of non-state actor 'strategic cultures,' or the "shared beliefs, assumptions, and modes of behaviour, derived from common experiences and common narratives that shape collective identity and relationships [...]." See J. Smith, J. Long *et al*., *Strategic Culture and Violent Non-State Actors: Weapons of Mass Destruction and Asymmetrical Operations Concepts and Cases*, INSS Occasional Paper No.64, USAF Institute for National Security Studies, USAF Academy, Colorado, February 2008, p. 3.

[362] S. Gibbs, T*he terrorist mind: A psychological and political analysis*, International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology April 1, 2006, pp. 121-138 and M. Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, Comparative Studies in Religion & Society, Aug. 2003.

[363] The field of social psychology, in turn, offers useful insights into how these vulnerabilities are inherently related to – and exacerbated by – unmet basic human needs. These may be *status-related* (such as a need for esteem, position and fairness); *existential* (a need for meaning); *relational* (the need to belong); *safety-related* (such as a need for protection); or *epistemic* (a need for understanding). See for example A. Silke, *Holy Warriors: Exploring the Psychological Processes of Jihadi Radicalization*, European Journal of Criminology, January 2008, pp. 99-123.

[364] There are noteworthy parallels with gang-related membership. See for example: *A New Approach to Countering Violent Extremism: Sharing Expertise and Empowering Local Communities*, FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, October 2014, https://leb.fbi.gov/2014/october/a-new-approach-to-countering-violent-extremism-sharing-expertise-and-empowering-local-communities. See also W. Kruglanski, M. J. Gelfand *et al.* pp. 69-93.

treatises. Prominent examples of these have ranged from Karl Marx's *Communist Manifesto* and Hitler's *Mein Kampf* to the works used and cited within the context of radical Islamic narratives, such as Ayman al-Zawahiri's *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner* or Sayyid Qutb's *Milestones*.[365] Such manifestos are also not solely the prerogative of political parties, terrorist groups and violent insurgencies. For example, the Japanese Yakuza – an organisation with over twenty branches across the country – advocates a code of honour with tenets that include chivalry and a no drug-taking policy.[366] Even then, theorists have increasingly argued that narratives are only really effective in driving as well as shaping recruitment, identity, and mobilisation when these are socialised within collective environments.[367] Indeed, a body of evidence highlights the galvanising role of social ecosystems ranging from universities and places of worship to prisons and inner-city projects in both spreading ideas and identifying potential followers.[368] A powerful example of this dynamic is that of the connections forged between al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) fighters and former Ba'athist senior party members in Camp Bucca, a large US prison complex near Umm Qasr in Southern Iraq that held close to 24,000 inmates. Here, jihadis, including future ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi who served five years in the camp, could congregate with likeminded individuals, identify new recruits with potential and discuss ideas for the future direction of the movement. As one set of expert commentators noted, the jihadis' "time in prison deepened their extremism and gave them opportunities to broaden their following. [...] The prisons became virtual terrorist universities: the hardened radicals were the professors; the other detainees were the students."[369] Furthermore, jihadi ideas and political ambitions now met the secularist, real-world technocratic expertise, organisational skills and knowledge of statecraft of disillusioned former senior members of Saddam Hussein's government who were also incarcerated at the camp.[370]

Separately, the Russian Thieves in Law, the aforementioned crime syndicate forged in Soviet-era Gulags, developed a strict day to day code which, quite fittingly, required members to have served prison sentences.[371] The relevance of collective environments is also clearly illustrated by the case of the Maras criminal gangs of Central America, a phenomenon which evolved out of Guatemala and El Salvador's lengthy civil wars.[372] Indeed, prisons flooded with Maras

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[365] See for example *Studies into Violent Radicalisation; Lot 2: The beliefs ideologies and narratives,* The Change Institute for the European Commission, February 2008, p. 34, http://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/doc_centre/terrorism/docs/ec_radicalisation_study_on_ideology_and_narrative_en.pdf.

[366] See also B. E. Hill, *The Modern* Yakuza*: Structure and Organisation*, The Japanese Mafia: Yakuza, Law, and the State, Oxford Academic, 7 April 2004, pp. 65-91. A similar code is also observable with the context of outlaw motorcycle gangs such as the Hells Angels.

[367] See for example A. Strindberg, *Social Identify Theory and the Study of Terrorism and Violent Extremism*, FOI-R--5062—SE, Swedish Defence Agency (FOI), December 2020, https://www.foi.se/rest-api/report/FOI-R--5062--SE.

[368] See C. Tognato, *Violent Extremist Influence on University Campuses*, American Intelligence Journal, Vol. 37, No.2, 2020, pp.72-81; C. R, McCauley and M. E. Segal, *Social psychology of terrorist groups*, In J. Victoroff & A. W. Kruglanski (eds.), *Psychology of terrorism: Classic and contemporary insights,* Psychology Press, 2009, *pp*. 331–346; K. Barbara, *The social psychology of aggression* (3rd ed.), New York (NY): Routledge, 2021; and C. Sia, B. Tan and K. Wei, *Group Polarization and Computer-Mediated Communication: Effects of Communication Cues*, Social Presence, and Anonymity, Information Systems Research, vol. 13, no. 1, 2002, pp. 70–90.

[369] T. McCoy, *How the Islamic State evolved in an American prison*, The Washington Post, November 4, 2014.

[370] Moreover, jihadis with an eye on the next phase of the armed campaign could now meet openly in a way that would have previously been close to impossible given the risk of attracting the attention of American intelligence. See M. Chulov, *Isis: the inside story*, The Guardian, Dec 11, 2014.

[371] F. Varese, *The Society of the Vory-v-Zakone, 1930s-1950s*, *Cahiers Du Monde Russe*, vol. 39, no. 4, 1998, pp. 515–538; and M. Schwirtz, *Vory v Zakone has hallowed place in Russian criminal lore*, The New York Times, July 29, 2008.

[372] More specifically, the modern Maras emerged out of a combination of Central American *Pandillas* – or localised, homegrown youth gangs of the 1960s and 1970s – and the more transnational *Maras*, which emerged out of the migration and displacement caused by the civil wars.

members in the Northern Triangle (i.e. El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua) continue to offer a conduit for recruitment, mobilisation and "confirmation of Maras identity as [one of] social outcasts."[373] In Jamaica meanwhile, local 'crews', a number of whom were formed in the country's schools, have long provided a social function, offering members a sense of belonging, status, membership and identity. They also offer a fertile recruitment ground for high-end trafficking organisations, with youngsters employed as a low risk and low-cost labour force – not least given the fact that they tend to receive more lenient penalties.[374]

Still, other observers have adopted more structural and utilitarian lenses when explaining recruitment dynamics, pointing to an active 'head hunting' process in which organisations look for specific skills and knowledge in their recruitment processes.[375] Theorists have also argued that it is possible to distinguish between the recruitment incentives of senior individuals and those of more junior members. For example, Luke Kemp *et al* argue that founding members of criminal groups tended to be more motivated by economic gain, whilst junior 'joiners' were instead driven primarily by long-term social dynamics and influences, including 'contagion' resulting from exposure to organised crime.[376] However, this analysis perhaps fails to recognise the full extent to which senior individuals have often risen through the ranks of organisations (and, as logic would have it, therefore started out in more junior positions). Moreover, even highly appealing brands and narratives cannot on their own meet the basic living needs and costs of prospective members. Thus, even small wages that remain comparatively larger than existing salaries can prove to be a significant draw for individuals, as observed in the case of, for example, Brazilian Favela gangs.[377] Moreover, although the reasons for joining ISIS were varied and complex, the wages paid by the organisation to foreign fighters were five times higher than the average salary in Syrian-controlled territory.[378]

4.4 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to highlight overarching patterns relating to the organisational morphology of clandestine non-state groups of different denominations, thus informing the design of this thesis' central analytical framework. In so doing, it also sought to test the thesis' second hypothesis, which posited that the organisational structure of groups was both adaptive and predicated around key considerations, such as the need to mitigate disruption and maximise new (political and economic) opportunities. The chapter began by highlighting prevailing concepts within the theoretical literature, including some of the characteristics that distinguish the operating models of clandestine non-state groups from other wider non-state

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[373] *Mafia of the Poor: Gang Violence and Extortion in Central America*, International Crisis Group, Report No.62, April 6, 2017, https://www.crisisgroup.org/latin-america-caribbean/central-america/62-mafia-poor-gang-violence-and-extortion-central-america.
Maras members who spent time interacting (and indeed competing) with other gangs in North America also brought back new practices, including the use of community-level cliques which *inter alia* allowed highly targeted recruitment in urban neighbourhoods. See A. Does, *The Construction of the Maras: Between Politicization and Securitization*, New edition (online), Graduate Institute Publications, Geneva, 2013, http://books.openedition.org/iheid/716.
[374] L. Goi, Jamaica Gangs Follow Regional Pattern of Recruiting From Schools, Insight Crime, April 2017, available online at: https://www.insightcrime.org/news/brief/jamaican-gangs-follow-regional-patter-recruiting-schools/.
[375] S. Windisch, M. K. Logan et al., *Headhunting Among Extremist Organizations: An Empirical Assessment of Talent Spotting*, Perspectives on Terrorism, Vol. 12, No. 2, April 2018, pp. 44-62.
[376] L. Kemp, S. Zolghadriha and P. Gill, *Pathways into organized crime: comparing founders and joiners*, Trends in Organized Crime (23), September 2020, pp. 203-226.
[377] See for example: C. Ramos da Cruz & D. H. Ucko, *Beyond the Unidades de Polícia Pacificadora: Countering Commando Vermelho's Criminal Insurgency*, Small Wars & Insurgencies, 29:1, 2018, pp. 38-67.
[378] E. Solomon, *The Isis economy: meet the new boss*, The Financial Times, January 5, 2015.[379] I. Primoratz*, What is Terrorism*?, Journal of Applied Philosophy, Vol. 7, No. 2, 1990, pp.129-138.

actor entities. Subsequently, and in line with the above hypothesis, the analysis demonstrated the extent to which the organisational structures of groups could be situated within their overall political-economic strategy. Group structures are therefore usually tailored to reflect varying goals, ranging from supplanting state governance systems (which, typically, requires the creation of functions and organs geared towards the provision of social service and justice) to expanding within new overseas territories as part of criminal business ventures. This also implies a highly adaptive logic in which group morphologies evolve in light of their strategic circumstances, including whether or not they are able to control territory.

The fact that groups reveal a propensity towards adopting polymorphism, such as when these configure themselves to engage in a combination of violent-political and criminal activity, complicates the task of formulating ridged typologies, even if (as we have seen) broad categorizations are possible. The analysis also showed how different structural configurations carried advantages and disadvantages and how the need to minimize disruption and maximize the pursuit of opportunities might require balancing trade-offs. For example, highly cellular and devolved network configurations tend to increase security and resilience but are not particularly effective when trying to govern territory. At the same time, any structural analysis also needs to account for strategic culture as well as ideological and organisational manifestos, including with respect to how these might influence the character and membership of groups as well as their approach to recruitment. Furthermore, one might reasonably assume that operational design is (at least partly) guided by the range of levers and capabilities available to groups, the latter of which explored in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5 – Levers of power

This third framework chapter focuses on the various instruments of power that allow clandestine non-state actors to translate and convert policy objectives (Chapter 3), via operational structures (Chapter 4) into real-world activities and effects. In doing so, it provides a basis for investigating the thesis' third hypothesis, namely that these actors consistently apply a variation on the types of levers available to states, albeit typically at a smaller scale, including with respect to the conduct of warfare, the pursuit of economic and financial interests, and strategic communications. Building on this analysis, the chapter argues that in today's highly connected world, even smaller groups can increasingly operate on a wider scale by both harnessing readily available, 'off the shelf' capabilities and expertise and by leveraging the services of a global network of logisticians, professional service providers and field operatives. In doing so, these actors are arguably able to deploy means that were previously available only to state actors, somewhat levelling the playing field between the state and sub-state levels. In reality, such capabilities are often applied in concert as part of sequenced campaigns of influence. Clearly, clandestine organisations may not *necessarily* use all of the levers and instruments outlined below but may instead draw on these selectively or partially in pursuit of their respective objectives.

5.1 Violence and the use of force

The use of violence is often cited as one of the defining characteristics of clandestine non-state actors, distinguishing them from other types of non-state organisations. For example, the likes of Igor Primoratz argue that the use of violence (or the threat thereof) effectively constitutes the defining feature of terrorism.[379] Insurgency scholars similarly highlight the extent to which conceptual understandings of the phenomenon are rooted in such actors' propensity to engage in armed and violent activity.[380] Criminologists have also at times been quick to highlight the extent to which violence formed an integral part of criminal strategies. Thus, Gilbert Geis notes that "violence in the world of organised crime has been more common than in other segments of the social structure."[381] Despite these common perceptions, and as we have already seen, clandestine non-state actors are not automatically pre-disposed towards violence, which is instead guided more often than not by deliberate policy choices as well as rational assessments relating to the ways of achieving their objectives. In this respect, Phil Williams' claim that violence, whilst "latent and often manifest, […] is not integral to the criminal activity," could therefore be applied to the wider cast list of clandestine actors.[382] Moreover, Alex de Waal's concept of 'political marketplaces', within which violence constitutes only one function (or, indeed, transactional currency) at the disposal of so-called 'political entrepreneurs', also injects helpful nuance into the debate.[383] All the same, it remains true that clandestine non-state actors regularly opt to employ violence for reasons and in ways that merit closer examination.

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[379] I. Primoratz*, What is Terrorism*?, Journal of Applied Philosophy, Vol. 7, No. 2, 1990, pp.129-138.
[380] See for example R. M. Wood, *Rebel capability and strategic violence against civilians*, Journal of Peace Research, Vol. 47, No. 5, September 2010, pp. 601-614; and F. Trebbi and E. Weese, *Insurgency and Small Wars: Estimation of Unobserved Coalition Structures*, Econometrica, Vol. 87, No. 2, March 2019, pp. 463-496.
[381] G. Geis, *Violence and Organized Crime*, The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences, Vol. 364, March 1966, pp. 86-95. For more contemporary accounts see for example: M. Caparini, *Conflict, Governance and Organized Crime: Complex Challenges for UN Stabilization Operations*, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), December 2022, p. 8.
[382] P. Williams, *Illicit markets, weak states and violence: Iraq and Mexico*, *Crime, Law & Social Change*, Vol. *52*, Issue 3, September 2009, pp. 323–36.
[383] A. de Waal, *Introduction to the political marketplace for policymakers*, Justice and Security Research Programme (JSRP) Policy Brief, London School of Economics and Political Science, March 2016, p. 3.

On the whole, analysis of the application of violence by different types of organisations points to broad coercive logic aimed at catalysing behavioural, attitudinal or systemic change amongst targeted parties.[384] In the case of terrorist, insurgent, guerrilla and rebel groups this is often – but by no means uniquely – directed at state actors such as governments and their security forces, thus demonstrating to their support bases that they can challenge the authority of these same protagonists. Criminal violence, meanwhile, may well be aimed at these same targets, such as in the case of pre-electoral violence aimed at influencing electoral outcomes or the behaviour of politicians (the Sicilian Mafia being a case in point).[385] However, it also constitutes a means of securing one's position within illicit markets and fending off competition, as witnessed in the case of the US Prohibition, Mexico's cartel wars or, famously, Pablo Escobar's campaigns of intimidation using legions of hired guns, so-called *Sicarios*.[386] Moreover, both categories of actors also use violence and acquire offensive capabilities for the purposes of deterrence and protection, with the aim of dissuading challengers (state and non-state) from potential aggression. Nevertheless, the acquisition of such capabilities for deterrence purposes arguably runs a risk of catalysing smaller scale manifestations of International Relations theory's 'security dilemma', where the defensive actions of one actor are interpreted as offensive or aggressive by another, potentially resulting in spiralling escalation.[387]

Clandestine non-state actors in the modern world are able to draw on a range of offensive capabilities, tools and weapons systems when seeking to engage in armed activity and acts of violence. From a purely tactical perspective, few capabilities have been as instrumental to clandestine organisations as the Kalashnikov AK-47 (and variants) automatic assault rifle.[388] The weapon, which was mass-produced by the Soviet military as a low cost, easy to use and reliable weapon system, became an icon for liberation movements in the wake of the Vietnam War. It has also been the weapon of choice for international terrorist groups dating at least to the 1972 Munich massacre, in which members of the Black September Palestinian group took eleven members of the Israeli Olympic team as hostages.[389] Current worldwide estimates place the current number of AK-47s at up to 200 million and, by the time of the Paris attacks in 2015, most terrorist and insurgent attacks worldwide were conducted using the weapon. As a result of its large numbers, the rifle is relatively easily easy to acquire: 750,000 disappeared from Albania alone following unrest in 1997.[390] Moreover, the traditional symbolism attributed to the AK-47 has become a regular feature of modern terrorist propaganda material, often propped up against the wall in the background of videos whilst leaders deliver *Fatwas* or rally followers to their cause.[391]

Demand for the AK-47 and other firearms has, in turn, opened niche business opportunities for those able and willing to source, smuggle and sell such weapons to buyers around the world. The black market for these weapons links 'supply' countries such as Albania, Libya and (perhaps ironically) the United States to both violent non-state actors and criminal

[384] See for example J. Waldron, *Terrorism and the Uses of Terror*, The Journal of Ethics, Vol. 8, No. 1, 2004, pp.5-35; and G. Duncan, *Drug trafficking and political power – oligopolies of coercion in Colombia and Mexico*, *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. *41, Issue* 2, March 2014, pp. 18–42; and
[385] A. Alesina, S. Salvatore and P. Pinotti, *Organized Crime, Violence and Politics*, The Review of Economic Studies, Vol. 86, Issue 2, March 2018, pp. 457-499.
[386] J. Mollison, *Rise and Fall of the Cocaine King*, The Guardian, September 2007.[387] C. L. Glaser, Charles, *The Security Dilemma Revisited*, World Politics, Vol. 50, No. 1, October 1997, pp. 171–201.
[387] C. L. Glaser, Charles, *The Security Dilemma Revisited*, World Politics, Vol. 50, No. 1, October 1997, pp. 171–201.
[388] The Mumbai attackers carried AK-56 Chinese versions of the AK-47.
[389] M. Hodges, *AK47: The Story of a Gun*, San Francisco: MacAdam/Cage Publishing, 2007, p. 82.
[390] S. Laville and J. Burke, *Why has the AK-47 become the jihadi terrorist weapon of choice?,* The Guardian, December 2015.
[391] The weapon was used in this way by Boko Haram, al Qaeda and ISIS.

organisations in a global trade that could be worth as much as USD3 billion per annum.[392] Interestingly – albeit perhaps unsurprisingly – almost all of the weapons available on the black market were either manufactured under government control, originated from military stockpiles or purchased by licensed gun dealers.[393] The weapons smuggling market includes brokers with international reach and connections, as well as geographic logistical centres benefitting from transport links or from permissive legislative frameworks. For example, relatively soft penalties for converting deactivated firearms in the Czech Republic and Slovakia has turned the countries into an important production and distribution centre for guns subsequently smuggled to organised crime and terrorist groups in Western Europe.[394]

As we have seen, in the 21st Century, even organisations with a narrower geographic focus have the advantage of being able to combine traditional, tried-and-tested principles of asymmetry and guerrilla tactics with new technologies and tactics drawn from across the world. An example of this trend is the growing use of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) globally. Such devices have both literally and figuratively exploded across various theatres of operation as part of both insurgent operations in conflict zones and terrorist attacks against civilian populations. Drawing on readily available bomb-making manuals and guidance, the devices can be manufactured from basic ingredients and components such as homemade explosives, fertiliser or artillery shells. These can also be configured to be employed by individual suicide bombers, deployed as car bombs, laid out on routes employed by military or government personnel, and/or detonated remotely using a variety of methods ranging from mobile phones and command wires to pressure plates.[395] Additionally, IED-manufacturing has broadly matched the development of countermeasures, as seen in the case of the Explosively Formed Projectiles (EFP) – copper slugs travelling at high velocity and designed to pierce through heavy armour – that were used against American troops in Iraq (the technology was allegedly introduced to the Iraqi insurgency by the Iranian Quds Force).[396]

Building on de Waal's concept of 'marketplaces', the provision of violence and protection may either be developed in house or outsourced to specialist providers (in a similar way to, say, states' use of private security companies and militias). Illustratively, the likes of Wolfram Lacher[397] and Matt Herbert[398] describe how, in contexts such as Mali, Libya and Tunisia, criminal and smuggling organisations have turned to armed militias and terrorist elements for protection. Clearly, this dynamic also introduces a potential area of overlap and intersection between state and non-state actors to the extent that both players may theoretically acquire the services of the same specialist (non-state) protection providers when pursuing their respective interests. For example, Lynette Ong points to the ways in which criminal elements are regularly deployed as third-party instruments of repression by local governments in China

[392] Based on estimates outlined in N. Marsh, *Two Sides of the Same Coin? The Legal and Illegal Trade in Small Arms*, The Brown Journal of World Affairs, Vol.9, No.1, Spring 2002, pp. 217-228.
[393] *Ibid*, p. 223.
[394] This was the case weapons used in the Paris attacks. See also M. Townsend, *From a Czech warehouse to a street near you: the journey of a gun*, The Guardian, 18 November 2018.
[395] An additional tactic favoured by insurgents is the so-called 'daisy chaining' of explosive devices connected to one another so that the detonation of one device along the chain would trigger that of others, potentially inflicting damage on a number of different targets such as armed vehicles in a road convoy or infantry soldiers on foot patrol. A. S. Hashim, *Chapter Four: Organisation, Targeting, Operational Art and Tactics*, The Adelphi Papers, Vol. 48, Issue 402, 2008, p. 48.
[396] P. McLeary, *Get the Facts Straight on Iran and EFPs*, Columbia Journalism Review, April 2007, available online at: https://archives.cjr.org/behind_the_news/get_the_facts_straight_on_iran.php.
[397] W. Lacher, *Organized Crime and Conflict in the Sahel-Sahara Region*, Carnegie Papers, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, September 2012, p.8
[398] M. Herbert, *States and Smugglers: The Ties that Bind and How they Fray*, Mediterranean Dialogue Serries, No. 17, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, January 2019, p. 6.

(including as a means of quashing protests),[399] whilst Ken Opala reveals patterns of widespread intimidation by both violent criminal gangs and militias on behalf of elements of Kenya's political elite ahead of elections.[400] In turn, this dynamic injects nuance into Biddel's concept of the non-state – state continuum, instead pointing to integrated and overlapping functional sub-networks (spanning across different points of the non-state–state divide) and catering to the needs of a broad range of clients.

5.2 Transport and logistics

The orchestration of clandestine activities is highly contingent on logistical chains as well as accompanying transport solutions. For insurgencies and rebel groups, this typically includes the ability to transport fighters and weaponry within the context of sustained armed campaigns. Meanwhile, logistical solutions, including transnational supply chains, are at the heart of organised criminal business models – constituting the means of bringing illicit goods to market and, therefore, of turning a profit. Perhaps unsurprisingly, an established body of literature points to the extent to which global connectivity and advancements in trade, logistics and transportation support the conduct of operations, increase the geographic reach and of scale activities and, ultimately, enable the projection of power. Observers such as Phil Williams,[401] Rajen Harshe,[402] John Murphy,[403] Philip Cerny,[404] and John McFarlane[405] have thus highlighted the extent to which connectivity has in one way or another catalysed the 'trans-nationalisation' of threats such as crime and terrorism.[406] Although it has been argued that globalisation is in retreat, modern-day non-state organisations (both licit and illicit) clearly continue to reap the benefits from inter-continental travel, communication and supply chain networks as well as accompanying infrastructure.

Even then, case study analysis suggests that the complexity and application of transport and logistics solutions can vary significantly between groups. For example, grassroots and rural insurgencies, rebel movements and smuggling networks may content themselves with relatively simple capabilities such as customised four by four vehicles – typically Toyota pickup truck variants – and motorbikes to meet their day-to-day operational needs. In contexts such as Somalia, Sudan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Mali, Chad and Niger, such rudimentary vehicles, which can also be fitted with heavy weaponry, have essentially provided groups with mechanised, 'light cavalry' and logistics capabilities that were once only at the disposal of conventional armies.[407] Other organisations have gone much further, acquiring, as in the case of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) as well as Mexican and Colombian drug cartels, their own fleets of aircraft and/or maritime capabilities (including, in the case of

[399] L. H. Ong, *Outsourcing Repression: Everyday State Power in Contemporary China*, New York: Oxford Academic (online edition), 2022, pp.16-43.
[400] K. Opala, *Criminal gangs and elections in Kenya*, EU/Enact Report, Issue 37, March 2023.
[401] See P. Williams et al., *Transnational Criminal Organisations and International Security*, Survival, Vol.36, No. 1, March 1994, pp. 96-113.
[402] R. Harshe, *Globalisation and Terrorism*, The Indian Journal of Political Science, Vol. 62, No. 3, 2001, pp.441–45.
[403] J. F. Murphy, *Impact of Terrorism on Globalization and Vice-Versa*, The International Lawyer, Vol. 36, No. 1, 2002, pp. 77-89.
[404] P. G. Cerny, *Terrorism and the New Security Dilemma*, Naval War College Review, Vol. 58, No. 1, Article 2, 2005, p.3.
[405] J. McFarlane, *Transnational Crime: Corruption, Crony Capitalism and Nepotism in the Twenty-First Century*, In P. Larmour and N. Wolanin (eds.), *Corruption and Anti-Corruption*, ANU Press, 2013, pp. 131–45.
[406] See also J. Arquilla and D. Ronfeldt (eds), *In Athena's Camp: Preparing for Conflict in the Information Age*, 1st ed., RAND Corporation, 1997, pp. 315–38.
[407] See also See for example S. C. Tucker (ed), *U.S. Conflicts in the 21st Century: Afghanistan War, Iraq War, and the War on Terror*, Vol. 1 (A-H), Santa Barbara: ABC, 2016, pp. 955-956.

the latter, specially designed submarines).[408] As the modern terrorist hijackings of airliners has shown, transport means can also be exploited for the purposes of committing sensationalist acts of violence.[409]

Both the theoretical and case study literature point to the growing role of independent logistical and professional smuggling networks offering clandestine delivery services to a range of different customers.[410] Moreover, the literature frequently highlights the extent to which these same service providers typically leverage local access – including through relationships with local security actors, cross-border communities and overseas diasporas – in the conduct of their operations.[411] Their knowledge of proven routes, gleaned either through 'dry runs' or insider information (such as in the context of maritime trafficking through major ports) provides them with the means of achieving efficiency and security, whilst reducing business overheads.[412] Furthermore, clandestine groups routinely harness and exploit high-volume trading solutions, hubs and infrastructure as well as economic free-movement zones within the context of their operations. Illustratively, container shipping today provides the primary vehicle for high-volume transatlantic cocaine trafficking, whilst tariff free and/or open border economic zones such as Schengen or the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) allow for largely uninhibited cross-jurisdictional smuggling.[413]

In the case of drug-smuggling networks, multi-customer business approaches using third party providers are evidenced by practices such as the use of dedicated stamps to designate consignments from different producers that are carried as part of the same loads. Indeed, such a practice has been observed within the context of heroin and methamphetamine trafficking across the Indian Ocean and hashish trafficking from Morocco.[414] The evidence also suggests that such service providers may at times constitute a key nexus point between different categories of organisations (such as criminal and insurgent). Illustratively, the often-cited Sahelian case of Mokhtar Belmokhtar, the so-called 'Marlborough Man', shows how influence

[408] See for example N. Manoharan, *Air Tigers' Maiden Attack: Motives and Implications*, Issue Brief, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, 2007, pp.1-4; M. Dunigan, D. Hoffmann *et al.*, *Adversary Capabilities in Maritime Irregular Warfare*, In *Characterizing and Exploring the Implications of Maritime Irregular Warfare*, Santa Monica (CA): RAND Corporation, 2012, pp. 69-86; C. Woody, *'El Chapo' Guzman had more airplanes than the biggest airline in Mexico,* Business Insider, May 2016; and B. Ramirez, *Colombian Cartel Tactical Note No. 1: The Evolution of 'Narco-Submarines' Engineering*, Small Wars Journal, https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/colombian-cartel-tactical-note-1.

[409] The use of hijacking for the purpose of political messaging began in earnest on July 22, 1968, when members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) commandeered an Israeli El Al flight traveling from Rome to Tel Aviv. In the following eight years, Palestinian groups would hijack sixteen airplanes, demanding recognition for the Palestinian cause as well as the release of activists imprisoned in Israel.
See D. L. Byman, *The 1967 War and the birth of international terrorism*, Brookings, May 30, 2017, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2017/05/30/the-1967-war-and-the-birth-of-international-terrorism/.

[410] J. Bastrup-Birk et al., *Next Generation Organised Crime: Systemic change and the evolving character of transnational organised crime*, Hague Centre for Strategic Studies (HCSS), May 2023, p. 8, https://hcss.nl/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Next-Generation-Organised-Crime-HCSS-2023-V2.pdf.

[411] See for example, T. Ayalew *et al.*, *Social Embeddedness of Human Smuggling in East Africa: Brokering Ethiopian Migration to Sudan*, African Human Mobility Review, Vol. 4, No. 3, December 2018, pp. 1333-1358.

[412] *Criminal Networks in EU Ports: Risks and challenges for law enforcement*, EUROPOL, March 2023, https://www.europol.europa.eu/cms/sites/default/files/documents/Europol_Joint-report_Criminal%20networks%20in%20EU%20ports_Public_version.pdf

[413] See for example *Container Control Programme*, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), https://www.unodc.org/ropan/en/BorderControl/container-control/ccp.html.

[414] See for example: *Analysis of Opiate Stamps Seized in the Indian Ocean: 2017-2021*, Afghan Opiate Trade Project, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2022, https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/AOTP/Drug_Stamp_Report_Online_1.pdf.

and smuggling expertise gained through cigarette and other commodity smuggling likely paved the way to his jihadist-terrorist linkages.[415] Meanwhile, Nicolas Gosset describes how different smuggling organisations operating in Georgia specialised in drugs, weapons and human trafficking have tended to benefit and draw on the same enabling environments in the conduct of their respective operations across the Caucasus, including by leveraging corrupt relationships and exploiting key transhipment corridors such as the Pankisi Gorge, South Ossetia and Abkhazia.[416]

5.3 Finance and money laundering

The conduct of clandestine activity is fundamentally dependent on funding, which provides the means of purchasing contraband and weapons as well as paying fighters and operatives. In turn, the academic and law enforcement literature highlights the wide plethora of at times complex and often-creative methods and approaches adopted by organisations around the world to raise, transfer and launder funds. These same approaches are steeped in history and tradition. Illustratively, historian Sterling Seagrave describes the ways in which, three thousand years ago, Chinese merchants hid their financial proceeds from rulers by moving these to other jurisdictions.[417] Similarly, early-18th century privateers sold and reinvested their loot via front companies and markets in North America and elsewhere.[418] Opportunities for raising and moving (illicit) proceeds have multiplied in the modern age of global commerce, catalysed by international banking, trade and technology. At the same time, analysis on the extent to which different denominations of clandestine organisations (terrorist, insurgent, criminal, and so on) leverage common financial systems and structures is largely absent in the theoretical debate – partly a product of academic and professional compartmentalisation. For example, James Mittelman and Robert Johnston note that research situating organised crime within the context of an increasingly connected global political economy (the latter of which falls within the purview of political science and economics) is insufficiently captured in the criminological literature.[419] Research and analysis on terrorist financing, including that conducted by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF, the intergovernmental organisation focused on combating illicit financial threats), has similarly tended to be thematically siloed.[420]

Overall, the literature highlights how the financial tools, instruments, and mechanisms at the disposal of clandestine organisations are, to a large extent, only limited by their creativity and access to expertise. Peter Neumann argues that "there are more terrorist organisations, with more money than ever before" despite "blacklists, frozen assets […] and countless regulations designed to prevent terrorist financing."[421] Shima Baradaran *et al* similarly posit that terrorist financial networks have largely been successful in circumventing domestic financial restrictions, including through the creative use of shell companies.[422] In their thorough

[415] *The Central Sahel: A Perfect Sandstorm*, Alternate Forms of Governance, International Crisis Group, June 2015, pp. 15-18.
[416] N. Gosset, *Confronting Threats from the Political-Criminal Nexus in Greater Central Eurasia: Implications for operations and future armed conflicts*, Royal Higher Institute for Defence, Securite & Strategie, No.128, December 2016.
[417] See N. Morris-Cotterill, *Money Laundering*, Foreign Policy, No. 124, May-June 2001, p. 16.
[418] See for example A. Tabarrok, *The Rise, Fall, and Rise Again of Privateers*, The Independent Review, Vol. 11, No. 4, Spring 2007, pp. 565–77.
[419] J. H, Mittelman and R. Johnston, *The Globalization of Organized Crime, the Courtesan State, and the Corruption of Civil Society*, Global Governance, Vol. 5, No. 1, Jan-Mar 1999, pp. 103–26.
[420] See for example *Emerging Terrorist Financing Risks*, Financial Action Task Force (FATF) Report, FATF, Paris, October 2015, https://www.fatf-gafi.org/content/dam/fatf-gafi/reports/Emerging-Terrorist-Financing-Risks.pdf.coredownload.pdf.
[421] P. R. Neumann, *Don't Follow the Money: The Problem With the War on Terrorist Financing*, Foreign Affairs, Vol. 96, No. 4, July-August 2017, p. 93.
[422] S. Baradaran *et al*., *Funding Terror*, University of Pennsylvania Law Review, Vol. 162, No.3, February 2014, pp. 477-536.

comparative study of terrorism financing techniques, Michael Freeman and Moyara Ruehsen point to spectrum of vehicles and methods used by different organisations to move their funds. These include Informal Value Transfer Systems (IVTS) such as *Hawala* banking, money service businesses, remittance providers, bureaux de change, formal banking services, high value commodities trading and the use of false invoicing.[423] Moreover, observers such as Rodger Shanahan have highlighted the extent to which terrorist groups have harnessed networks of charities and non-governmental organisations – some of these operating behind a humanitarian façade.[424]

Organised crime groups, meanwhile, have arguably leveraged an even greater range of financial mechanisms, resorting *inter alia* to complex and multi-layered offshore money laundering systems and structures aimed at obscuring the origin and movement of funds. A body of literature, in turn, points to the concept of an increasingly interconnected and global 'shadow economy' in which all manner of clandestine organisations, aided by a cadre of so-called 'professional enablers' (white collar specialists such as bankers, tax advisers, notaries and lawyers), are able to circumvent legislation and regulatory frameworks when seeking to move funds across borders.[425] Moreover, technology, including online market spaces and banking services as well as crypto-currencies has arguably exacerbated what Louise Shelly once described as a fundamental transformation in "the very nature of crime itself," all the while threatening "the integrity of the financial system."[426]

These patterns can be further illustrated through the examination of case studies spanning across regions and group denominations. The Lebanese Hezbollah pioneered advanced methods of raising and distributing funds, including in support of its clandestine operations. Over the years, the organisation established tentacles in many industries, a process overseen by a specialist office – the Business Affairs Component (BAC) – situated within Hezbollah's External Security Organisation branch.[427] Hezbollah has also monetised its expertise in money laundering by providing ready-made consultancy services to other clandestine groups. Some of its most profitable ventures take place far away from its 'home turf', such as in Latin America – a region with a lucrative drugs trade and relatively permissive regulatory environment. Here, Hezbollah-linked businesses offer specialised money laundering solutions to customers in localities such as the 'triple frontier' region where the borders of Paraguay, Argentina and Brazil meet. Illustratively, one small currency exchange house linked to Hezbollah's BAC located in Ciudad del Este, close to the Paraguayan border, reportedly laundered almost US $1.5 million in narcotics revenue in exchange for a healthy commission.[428] The separate case

[423] M. Freeman and M. Ruehesen, *Terrorism Financing Methods: An Overview*, *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 7, No. 4, August 2013, pp. 5–26
[424] R. Shanahan, *Charities and terrorism: Lessons from the Syrian Crisis*, Lowly Institute Report, March 2018, pp. 2-13.
[425] *Professional Money Laundering,* Financial Action Task Force (FATF), 2018, p.6. The Organisation for Economic Development and Co-Operation (OECD) concluded in one study that the overall size of the shadow economy in some countries amounted to around 20 percent of GDP. Shining Light on the Shadow Economy: Opportunities and Threats, OECD, 2017, https://www.oecd.org/tax/crime/shining-light-on-the-shadow-economy-opportunities-and-threats.pdf; See also L. Medina and F. Schneider, *Shadow Economies Around the World: What Did We Learn Over the Last 20 Years?* International Monetary Fund (IMF) Working Paper No. 2018/017, January 2018.
[426] L. I. Shelly, *Crime and Corruption in the Digital A*ge, Journal of International Affairs, Vol. 51, No. 2, 1998, pp. 605–20.
[427] *Attacking Hezbollah's Financial Network: Policy Options*, Hearing Before the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, Serial No. 115-51, US Government Publishing Office, Washington DC, June 2017, p. 10.
[428] E. Ottolenghi, *Lebanon is Protecting Hezbollah's Cocaine Trade in Latin America*, June 2018, Foreign Policy, https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/06/15/lebanon-is-protecting-hezbollahs-cocaine-and-cash-trade-in-latin-america/.

of Kassim Tajideen, a money launderer who worked on behalf of Hezbollah, is also revealing. According to his indictment, Tajideen, a Lebanese-Belgian citizen, ran a business empire which acted as a particularly effective front for concealing international wire-transfers amongst wider business transactions conducted by corporate entities with (deliberately) bland names such as the International Cross Trade Company (ICTC), Epsilon Trading Fze and Sicam Ltd.[429] On paper, Tajideen ran a family business which, as well as offering shipping solutions, traded in poultry, rice, real estate and diamonds.[430] In reality however, his business accounts were used to launder as much as US $50 million of Hezbollah's funds.[431]

As hinted at above, analysis of money laundering systems reveals the extent to which criminal groups have been adept at harnessing systems that fundamentally intersect with the regulated financial system. Thus, the illicit 'shadow' economy is not entirely 'parallel' or 'separated' from the formal economy but instead often exploits and harnesses 'licit' commercial and financial structures within a global financial system lacking accountability and transparency. Illustratively, the so-called 'Panama Papers' – a large trove of financial records that were leaked from the Panamanian law firm Mossack Fonseca in 2016 – highlighted various uses of offshore structures, trusts and corporate service providers in the movement of illicit funds (the papers generated almost 3,500 named individual and company 'matches' against existing Europol records).[432] To be sure, entities such as shell companies and trusts are relatively easy to set up and offer an effective mechanism through which to mask illicit activity behind a facade of licit business activity. In reality however, these vehicles may amount to little more than a name and an address registered to a building located in an offshore jurisdiction to which hundreds of other businesses are also registered.[433] Shell companies can be easily set up via intermediaries using a range of corporate service providers. They need not have any physical employees or products and can be owned by other corporations, nominee shareholders or directors. Once established, these can also hold bank accounts, own property and control assets.[434]

Also illustrative of this theme was the so called 'Russian Laundromat' affair – a scheme that involved the laundering of over twenty billion US dollars linked to, *inter alia*, Russian oligarchs and criminals. Money was 'loaded' onto accounts associated with shell companies that existed only on paper registered in the UK, New Zealand and Cyprus. The companies were then attributed fake business debts, which were ordered to be paid by a corrupt judge in Moldova.[435] The indebted company would then default on the payment, which would in turn trigger a repayment by a third-party company, which had been deliberately set up as a creditor (or

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Interestingly, the airport of Ciudad del Este has become a notorious and trans-shipment point for narcotics and contraband consignments.

[429] See *United States of America v. Kassim Tajideen*, District Court for the District of Columbia Indictment 1:17-cr-00046, March 2017.

[430] S. S. Hsu, *Lebanese businessman accused of funding Hezbollah pleads guilty to money laundering*, The Washington Post, December 2018.

[431] ICTC accounts, for example, transferred funds from the UAE to multiple jurisdictions, including the United States. See S. Rubenfeld, *Lebanese Businessman Pleads Guilty to Money Laundering*, The Wall Street Journal, December 2018, https://www.wsj.com/articles/lebanese-businessman-pleads-guilty-to-money-laundering-1544200756.

[432] D. Pegg, *Panama Papers: Europol links 3,500 names to suspected criminals*, The Guardian, December 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/news/2016/dec/01/panama-papers-europol-links-3500-names-to-suspected-criminals.

[433] Financial services amount to as much as two thirds of the economy in the Cayman Islands.

[434] D. Morrisey, *Shells Trusts and Similar Entities in International Money Laundering*, US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Financial Investigations (Miami).

[435] *The Russian Laundromat Exposed*, Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, March 2017, https://www.occrp.org/en/laundromat/the-russian-laundromat-exposed/.

guarantor).[436] These funds were then paid into a court-controlled account held by Moldindconbank in Moldova, at which point the money was essentially certified and ready for use. Funds were subsequently either withdrawn or transferred onwards, including through Trasta Komercbanka in Latvia, which offered a gateway into the European Union. At this stage, the funds could be transferred easily into larger banks, including Deutsche Bank and Danske Bank.[437] One of the interesting features of the Laundromat affair is that the vast money laundering scheme effectively amounted to a criminal operation in its own right. Just as in the case of specialist transporters, money launderers have therefore also been able to erect their own complex organisations and networks, carving out a position within the international clandestine system.[438]

Meanwhile, examples of technology within the context of clandestine financial operations abound. The use of cryptocurrencies in the conduct of organised crime gained notoriety within the context of Silk Road, a 'dark web' website through which buyers accessed and purchased drugs and other illicit products via digital crypto payments.[439] Michael McGuire similarly describes how most major online booking services such as, for example, the Uber cab-hailing application and AirBnB property letting service, have been exploited for the purposes of money laundering, whilst similarly shining a light on the exploitation of digital marketplaces and social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, eBay and Amazon by tech-savvy criminals.[440] Money can also be transferred via gambling websites: one such approach consists of depositing a large amount of funds into an online betting account, placing a few symbolic bets for the purposes of appearance, and then emptying the entire account.[441] Even then, 'tried and tested', localised methods of laundering funds continue to be widely used by organisations seeking to avoid digital signatures. Various branches of the Italian Mafia, Albanian organised crime groups and Chinese triads have therefore shown a preference for traditional uses of small, cash-rich front businesses such as restaurants, nail salons, petrol stations and hotels, alongside real estate investments and construction projects.[442] In the case of the Italian Mafia, criminal bosses developed strategic financial relationships with wealthy restaurateurs and business owners to meet their laundering needs. One such partnership involved the *Righis*, a family who built a large food enterprise in Rome. The family reportedly offered direct investment access to the *Contini Camorra* mafia clan in exchange for protection, a non-union-aligned workforce and discounted black-market ingredients. [443]

[436] The creditor usually consisted of a Russian company involving Moldovan citizens, which is why the case could be settled in a Moldovan court.
[437] Deutsche Bank was also investigated within the context of a mirror-trading scheme facilitated by the Bank's Moscow headquarters which consisted of a software-enabled automated process that imitated international forex trading behaviours, alongside dummy stock purchases.
See for example M. Chan, *Case Study: Deutsche Bank Money Laundering Scheme*, Seven Pillars Institute for Global Finance and Ethics, April 2017, https://sevenpillarsinstitute.org/case-study-deutsche-bank-money-laundering-scheme/.
[438] See also See also See also V. Sokolov, *From Guns to Briefcases: The Evolution of Russian Organized Crime*, World Policy Journal, Duke University Press, Vol. 21, No. 1, Spring 2004, pp. 68-74.
[439] M.H Maras, *Inside Darknet: The Takedown of Silkroad, Centre for Crime and Justice Studies*, CJM No.98, December 2014, pp. 22-23.
[440] See A. Cuthbertson, *Cyber criminals earn $1.5 trillion through Amazon, Facebook and Instagram exploitation*, The Independent, April 2018.
[441] E. Baker, *How Money Laundering Works in Online Gambling*, Casino.org, July 2019, https://www.casino.org/blog/money-laundering-in-online-casinos/.
[442] M. Gottschalk, *'Where the is Pizza there's the Mafia'*, Foreign Policy, August 2007, https://foreignpolicy.com/2007/08/23/where-there-is-pizza-theres-the-mafia/.
[443] D. Conti, *'Want Some Mafia with your Pizza? How The Mob is Taking Over Rome's Restaurants'*, International Business Times, Feb 2014.

5.4 Communication and propaganda

Clandestine campaigns often hinge on communication and propaganda activity, which constitutes a critical means of promoting ideological narratives, mobilising support, sustaining recruitment and infiltrating territory. In turn, the ways and means of doing so may vary considerably across contexts and theatres. David Galula, for example, once noted that "the insurgent, having no responsibility, is free to use every trick; if necessary, he can lie, cheat [and] exaggerate," also adding that "with no positive policy but with good propaganda, the insurgent may still win."[444] For Christopher Harmon and Randall Bowdish, arguments and ideas advanced by groups may gain rapid traction even when these are not entirely coherent, provided the (political) circumstances are generally favourable to these arguments.[445] Ethan De Mesquita and Eric Dickson go further, connecting propaganda with defined objectives such as provoking reactions (such as repressive policies) from state actors that can subsequently be leveraged to justify the terrorist's cause.[446] Commenting on organised crime, meanwhile, Howard Campbell discusses the concept of 'narco-propaganda' in which organisations utilise a combination of criminal behaviour (including violence), videos, symbols and social and mass media as "quasi-ideological expressions" of political and social power.[447] Certainly, as observers such as Cristina Archetti,[448] Reem Ahmed[449] and Richard Moule *et al*[450] point out, the methods of – and opportunities for – disseminating ideas and concepts to multiple audiences has increased significantly within the modern, digitally connected, world.

The relationship between clandestine groups, the media and communication technology as well as the evolution of propaganda methods can be traced across subsequent generations of revolutionary, guerrilla, criminal and partisan movements. Four days after the start of Russia's February Revolution in 1917, the Petrograd Soviet newspaper issued its first newsletter, *Izvestiia* (or news), which would eventually become the official paper of the Soviet government. The international dimension of the movement became increasingly apparent when Bolshevik-supported revolts erupted across Germany, catalysed by sympathetic Bolshevik foreign correspondents.[451] At the same time, the Bolsheviks experimented with new ways of communicating with the masses, including through formats such as newsreels, pamphlets, posters (a method previously used for the purpose of Great War propaganda) and even so-called 'agit-trains' – decorated trains carrying films and projectors aimed at bringing ideas to the largely uneducated rural population. This approach recognised the power of visual

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[444] D. Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, p. 11.
[445] C. C. Harmon and R. G. Bowdish, *The Terrorist Argument: Modern Advocacy and Propaganda*. Brookings Institution Press, 2018. pp. 5-18.
[446] E. B. de Mesquita and E. S. Dickson, *The Propaganda of the Deed: Terrorism, Counterterrorism, and Mobilization*, American Journal of Political Science, Vol. 51, No. 2, April 2007, pp. 364-81.
[447] H. Campbell, *Narco-Propaganda in the Mexican 'Drug War': An Anthropological Perspective*, Latin American Perspectives, Vol. 41, No. 2, March 2014, pp. 60-77.
[448] C. Archetti, *Terrorism, Communication and New Media: Explaining Radicalization in the Digital Age*, Perspectives on Terrorism, Vol. 9, No. 1, February 2015, pp. 49-59.
[449] R. Ahmed *Online Radicalisation: Current Debates and State Responses*, Sicherheit Und Frieden (S+F) / Security and Peace 37, No. 2 2019, pp. 87-91.
[450] R. K. Moule, D. C. Pyrooz, and S. H. Decker, *Internet Adoption and online Behaviour Among American Street Gangs: Integrating Gangs and Organizational Theory*, The British Journal of Criminology 54, No. 6, November 2014, pp. 1186-1206.
[451] John Reed and Louise Bryant, two supportive American journalists, later published first-hand accounts of this period, *Ten Days that Shook the World* and *Six Red Months in Russia.* See K. McElvanney*, Reporting the Russian Revolution*, British Library, https://www.bl.uk/russian-revolution/articles/reporting-the-russian-revolution#. For an account of events in Germany, see G.P. Bassler, *The Communist Movement in the German Revolution, 1918-1919 A Problem of Historical Typology?*, Central European History, Vol. 6, No. 3, Published by: Cambridge University Press on behalf of Central European History Society, September 1973, pp. 233-277.

mediums in a society in which cinema was becoming the major form of entertainment.[452] The use of the new formats and products spread, exported around the world by socialist idealogues. By the time of the Spanish Civil War, both cinematographic and printed content was produced at scale as a means of mobilising support for and against the Communists' cause, whilst radio broadcasting was used for the first time in conditions of warfare.[453] The conflict also became an early testing ground for the use of information as a lever of proxy warfare, with foreign powers seeking to shape international attitudes and opinions. Strikingly, the call to arms was answered by over 35,000 foreign volunteer fighters from around the world seeking to join Communist International Brigades from 1936 onwards; a demonstration of the global reach of ideological narratives when combined with new dissemination methods as well as of their potential to mobilise multinational (non-state) support for a political cause.[454]

These developments set the tone for World War II – a conflict that witnessed the widespread production and distribution of propaganda material by partisan groups. Within a month of France's occupation by German troops, organisations such as the Paris-based *Musée de l'Homme*, one of the earliest French Résistance networks, began to be publish and distribute clandestine newspapers. The organisation consisted of eight sub-groups, which conducted activities ranging from intelligence gathering to producing periodicals such as *La Verité Française* and *Valmy*.[455] The network also produced hundreds of thousands of pamphlets carrying anti-fascist slogans, some of which were printed on adhesive paper that could be stuck to buildings. Clearly, the risks associated with such activities were high: the architects and backers of *La Vérité française*, including members of the clergy, were rounded up in November 1941 and many of them executed after the group was infiltrated by a German agent.[456] Nevertheless, the work of organisations such as *Musée de l'Homme* and other partisan and resistance groups involved in anti-Axis propaganda across occupied Europe set a powerful precedent for post-war clandestine movements.

With the press, radio and even cinema having now been harnessed by clandestine organisations to broadcast their messages, the stage was set for the introduction of a new, critical, addition to the publicity arsenal: the television.[457] By the 1950s, television sets were being mass-produced for the public with channels adapting the model of radio broadcasting to bring entertainment and news to viewers around the world. The medium gradually established itself as a key conduit for shaping political opinion and relaying high-publicity events. Dwight Eisenhower's presidential campaign staff, for example, began developing shorter, snappier sound bites that could be more easily relayed by television networks. Also in the United States, organised crime contributed disproportionately to establishing the nexus between television and American culture when slow-talking Tennessee Senator Estes Kefauver chaired a series of televised hearings against the criminal boss Frank Costello, a

[452] R. Taylor, *A Medium for the Masses: Agitation in the Soviet Civil War, Soviet Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 4, April 1971, pp. 562-574.
[453] O.W. Riegal, *Press, Radio, and the Spanish Civil War*, The Public Opinion Quarterly, Vol. 1, No. 1, January 1937, p. 134.
[454] See for example J. Marco and P.P. Anderson, *Legitimacy by Proxy: searching for a usable past through the International Brigades in Spain's post-Franco democracy, 1975-2015*, Journal of Modern European History, 2016.
[455] Named after the French victory over the Austro-Prussian armies in the lead to the proclamation of the French Republic in September 1792.
[456] F. Bourrée, *La Vérité française*, Le réseau dit du Musée de l'Homme, Musée de la Résistance en Ligne: 1940-1945, http://museedelaresistanceenligne.org/expo.php?expo=127&theme=253&stheme=486.
[457] The very first model, initially called 'televisor', was invented in 1926 by John Logie Baird who used makeshift materials that included an old tea chest, scissors and bicycle light lenses in order to transfer a moving image to a screen. See J. Staufenberg, *Who invented the television: five facts you need to know about John Logie Baird*, The Independent, 26 January 2016.

notorious gambling magnate and so-called Mafia 'diplomat.'[458] The hearings, in which cameras famously honed in on Costello's nervous hands, not only demonstrated that reality programming could be as popular as entertainment shows or sports; they also signalled the dawn of modern, televised journalism.[459]

For many observers of international affairs, the watershed moment in the evolution of televised news broadcasting of foreign affairs presented itself in the form of the Vietnam War. Here, evening news reports brought footage of combat, bombing campaigns, casualties, and significant events such as the 1968 North Vietnamese Tet Offensive to viewers from across the world and, most critically, to American living rooms. Indeed, the domestic voting population could now (quite literally) observe its country's foreign policy in action. Whilst the true impact of television on the war remains a matter of debate,[460] this did not stop President Lyndon B. Johnson from complaining that "historians must only guess at the effect that television would have had during earlier conflicts on the future of this Nation."[461] The political establishment was further rocked when CBS Evening News anchor Walter Cronkite, 'the most trusted man in America', declared the war a stalemate in February 1968 (shortly after, Johnson announced that he would not be running for re-election).[462]

Certainly, the potential of the medium to shape the attitudes and perceptions of audiences around the world was not lost on clandestine movements, a trend which became apparent when the Palestinian group Black September took Israeli athletes as hostages during the mass-mediatised 1972 Munich Olympics. Thus began what became known as a so-called symbiotic relationship between terrorists and the mass media – the former seeking out the 'oxygen of publicity' required to fuel their political cause; the latter (at least according to sceptics) benefitting from the sensationalist nature of terrorist incidents when competing for viewer attention. Bruce Hoffman thus argues that "without the media's coverage the act's impact is arguably wasted, remaining narrowly confined to the immediate victim(s) of the attack", and therefore failing to "gain the maximum potential leverage [required] to effect fundamental political change."[463] Indeed, the majority of violent terrorist acts of the last five decades – airplane hijackings, high profile attacks and suicide bombings – have been calibrated towards attracting media attention as a means of striking fear amongst some audiences, whilst attracting support from others.

The ability to both generate content and disseminate messages to different audiences around the world has further increased in the modern age of the internet. Clandestine groups are no longer dependent on the editorial decisions of newspapers or television producers and have a fuller reign over messages and narratives. Thus, in 1998, David Duke, the figurehead of America's white supremacist movement wrote about the internet that it would "facilitate a worldwide revolution of white awareness" as well as offer more direct access to its target

[458] K.J. Frydl, *The Drug Wars in America 1940-1973*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2013, p. 100.
[459] T. Doherty, *Frank Costello's Hands: Film, television and the Kefauver crime hearings*, Film History, Vol. 10, No. 3, 1998, pp. 359-374.
[460] The argument here is that it was in fact the gradual erosion of consensus and support for the campaign amongst the political elite that shaped its outcome.
See for example D. C. Hallin, *The Media, the War in Vietnam, and Political Support: A Critique of the Thesis of an Oppositional Media*, The Journal of Politics, Vol. 46, No. 1, 1984, pp. 2–24, and J. Achenabach, *Did the news media, led by Walter Cronkite, lose the war in Vietnam?*, The Washington Post, May 25, 2018.
[461] M. Mandelbaum, *Vietnam: The Television War*, *Daedalus*, Vol. 111, No. 4, 1982, pp. 157.
[462] M. Bowden, *When Walter Cronkite Pronounced the War a 'Stalemate'*, New York Times, February 26, 2018.
[463] See A. Spencer, *Lessons Learnt: Terrorism and the Media*, AHRC Public Policy Series No. 4, Arts and Humanities Research Council, March 2012, p. 8.

audiences.[464] New online platforms would indeed be harnessed as a means of conveying ideas and ambitions without having to pass through filters and intermediaries, ensuring, as Bin Laden once remarked, that "people [could] understand that what we are telling them is rational."[465] Illustratively, ISIS produced *Dabiq* – a glossy, online magazine which borrowed from al Qaeda's own production, *Inspire,* which was also available in English. As Robert Bunker and Pamela Bunker posit, the online magazine format offers dual benefits, allowing widespread circulation, whilst at the same time presenting a coherent, carefully edited vision (or party line) and accompanying content "without the distortion found in more interactive forms of online media such as chat rooms and forums".[466] Thus, Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens and Nick Kaderbhai argue that interactive mediums of online communication may shape the attitudes of clandestine support bases to a greater degree than their ideologues and leaders – a dynamic in which online "accessibility [has] trumped ideological authority."[467]

Similarly, social media has played an increasingly important role both in terms of spreading narratives and as a catalyst for radicalisation, offering a powerful means through which to engage in ideological and identity discourse. It was, for example, harnessed by ISIS to propagate a sense of radical, apocalyptic change amongst its followers, with the aim of fuelling excitement and support for its vision of a new caliphate via viral, online social contagion. Whilst the organisation utilised all available platforms, it developed a particular preference for Twitter (now X), a medium also favoured by the Taliban and President Trump. Twitter's appeal consisted of the ability to disseminate a steady stream of propaganda to followers, whilst tweets often included links to other external media content (which, typically, was also produced by the organisation), thus 'confirming' or strengthening messages.[468] A variation of this approach, in turn, can be observed in far right organisations, who have turned to platforms such as Telegram, Facebook and YouTube to both organise campaigns and circulate 'everyday life' videos aimed at encouraging new membership.[469]

Such methods are also used widely by other types of clandestine organisations, including transnational criminal groups. For example, ethnic Albanian criminal gangs involved in cocaine trafficking have turned to social media for demonstrations of wealth and lifestyle as a means of enhancing their reputation and recruiting younger members. These include *Hellbanianz* grassroots gangs with an active presence in East London whose 'specialty' consists of offering local retail services, primarily via street dealing, to the higher echelons of the Albanian Mafia.[470] The potential for glitz, glamour and wealth associated with *Hellbanianz* membership is advertised quite explicitly and openly on platforms such as Instagram. Here, tattoo-clad members pose with eye-catching Ferraris, Lamborghinis and Rolls Royce Phantoms wearing Rolex watches, designer clothes and jewellery. Group photos, moreover, distinctly emphasise an image of brotherhood and fraternity. Videos routinely focus on the gangs' criminal brand

[464] H. J. Ingram, *Islamic State's English-language magazines, 2014-2017: Trends & implications for CT-CVE strategic communications*, International Centre for Counter-Terrorism Research Paper, March 2018, p. 8.
[465] *Draft of a letter to subordinates* (declassified), Bin Laden's Bookshelf, Office of the Director of National Intelligence, https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ubl2017/english/Draft%20of%20a%20letter%20to%20subordinates.pdf.
[466] R. J. Bunker and P. L Bunker, pp. 1-2.
[467] A. Meleagrou-Hitchens and N. Kaderbhai, *Research Perspectives on Online Radicalisation: A Literature Review 2006-2016*, International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR), King's College London, 2017, p. 9.
[468] *Ibid*, p. 64
[469] See for example K. Ihlebæk *et al.*, *What is the relationship between the far right and the media?*, Centre for Research on Extremism, University of Oslo, September 7, 2020, https://www.sv.uio.no/c-rex/english/groups/compendium/what-is-the-relationship-between-the-far-right-and-the-media.html.
[470] M. Bridge, *Albanian gangsters flaunt drugs and guns on Instagram*, The Times, November 13, 2018.

through hashtag descriptors such as '#gang' and '#killer', whilst showing members smoking cannabis, bragging about cocaine distribution and insulting the police.[471] Trap music clips also remind viewers that the gang is "ready for violence."[472] *Hellbanianz* Instagram followers are almost exclusively made up of young males, explaining the potential impact and appeal of descriptions and comments such as "[I] told her my life's like a movie, you ain't gotta go [to the] cinema."[473]

5.5 (Counter) Intelligence and operational security

Organisations operating in the face of adversity – including sustained attempts by state actors to disrupt their activities – have had to adopt a range of measures aimed at enhancing their operational security and ensuring secrecy. Moreover, the theme of clandestine non-state actor uses of communication technology (see above) also introduces a closely related topic: that of (at times) sophisticated intelligence methods and capabilities as a key operational enabler. Speaking of guerrilla movements, Patricia Hoffman commented that "the primary element [in their] favour is superior intelligence," and that "to evade the adversary's strengths and attack his weaknesses, a guerrilla must know the enemy's disposition and readiness, his movements and intentions, his proclivities and patterns," whilst at the same time keeping "his own intentions hidden from the adversary."[474] John Gentry expands on the concept, suggesting that clandestine non-state actors harness intelligence for the purposes of planning attacks, protecting themselves from (state actor) penetration, ensuring their survival and shaping the overall operating environment.[475] Reflecting on these dynamics, David Strachan-Morris posits that such actors need to be understood as intelligence actors in their own right.[476] Turning to terrorist actors specifically, Mohammad Iqbal describes the ways in which groups have adapted to and learned from state intelligence methods, at times 'leapfrogging' them through their ability to implement new measures at a faster pace.[477] Moreover, a smaller but growing body of analysis points to criminal uses of (counter) intelligence methods by organised crime groups, including for the purposes of anonymisation (recent analysis also highlights how artificial intelligence is also being leveraged for this purpose).[478]

Clandestine reconnaissance and intelligence-gathering methods, in turn, have been employed consistently throughout history. Native American warriors employed smoke signals to warn of impending dangers and rally support from other tribes, whilst armies dating back to at least the campaigns of Genghis Khan used dispatch riders and homing pigeons to relay orders and intelligence between field units.[479] During the American Revolutionary War, informants

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[471] Analysis of *Hellbanianz* Instagram accounts and followers, January 2021.
[472] M. Townsend, *Kings of cocaine: how the Albanian mafia seized control of the UK drugs trade*, The Guardian, January 13, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jan/13/kings-of-cocaine-albanian-mafia-uk-drugs-crime.
[473] *Hellbanianz* Instagram analysis, January 2021.
[474] P. D. Hoffman, *Seeking Shadows in the Sky: The Strategy of Air Guerrilla Warfare*, Air University Press, June 2000, p. 22, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/resrep13758.8.pdf.
[475] J. A. Gentry, *Toward a Theory of Non-State Actors' Intelligence*, Intelligence and National Security, Vol. 31, Issue 4, 2015, pp. 465-489.
[476] D. Strachan-Morris, *Developing theory on the use of intelligence by non-state actors: five case studies on insurgent intelligence*, Intelligence and National Security, Vol. 34, September 2019, pp. 980-984.
[477] M. N. F. Iqbal, *Leapfrogging: Terrorists and State Actors*, Small Wars Journal, August 2017, https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/leapfrogging-terrorists-and-state-actors.
[478] See for example V. Ciancaglini et al., *Malicious Uses and Abuses of Artificial Intelligence*, Trend Micro Research, December 2021, https://www.europol.europa.eu/publications-events/publications/malicious-uses-and-abuses-of-artificial-intelligence.
[479] These were reflected *inter alia* in the British Navy's Permanent Fighting Instructions of 1691. See J. J. Tritten and L. Donolo, *The Navies of the United States, Great Britain, France, Italy and Spain*, A Doctrine Reader, Newport Papers (No.9), Naval War College, December 1995, pp. 4-6.

working for both the British and American colonists used unofficial messengers who operated outside the colonial postal system. At the time of the Peninsular War of 1807-1814, the Duke of Wellington leveraged an entire ring of non-state agents who supplied vital intelligence on the movements, intentions and morale of French reinforcements.[480] Intelligence-gathering activity reached a historical climax during World War II, during which entire networks of local informants and operatives moved across borders and occupied zones to both report on enemy movements and conduct subversive activities such as sabotage.[481] Nancy Wake, a British agent who worked with the French Resistance to help hundreds of allied soldiers escape occupied France, believed that her most useful contribution to the war effort consisted of cycling five hundred kilometres to replace the codes of her wireless operator.[482] Traditional intelligence gathering and target reconnoitring techniques continued to be utilised widely by clandestine organisations in the second half of the 20th Century. During the Vietnam War, for example, the Viet Cong employed local militia groups to provide information on events and enemy movements in and around their villages,[483] whilst the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) surveyed potential targets prior to kidnappings and collected human counterintelligence insights from corrupt government officials.[484] Taking this trend even further, the Mexican Las Zetas and Los Caballeros Templarios (Knights Templar) cartels enlisted former Special Forces soldiers trained in both intelligence gathering and interrogation.[485]

Today, the act of collecting useful information and identifying targets is simplified by modern technology. Operatives engaging in hostile reconnaissance can research potential operations via commercially available online maps and satellite imagery. They can also photograph, film, monitor and share information on targets and enemy movements using little more than their smartphones.[486] Air assets such as commercially available drones, meanwhile, have been

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[480] For a detailed account of Wellington's intelligence network see H. J. Davies' *Spying for Wellington: British Military Intelligence in the Peninsular War*, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 2018.

[481] The US Special Operations Research Office highlighted the seminal role of such agents in reporting on transport and communication links, but also in "conducting strategic acts of sabotage and encouraging the populace to engage in general acts of destruction" as well as to "commit people more firmly to the cause." A. R. Mulner *et al.*, *Undergrounds in Insurgent, Revolutionary and Resistance Warfare, Special Operations Research Office*, American University, Washington D.C, November 1963, pp. 30-31, Approved for release in September 1999. Available online at: https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP78-03581R000200100001-5.pdf.

[482] K. Willsher, *Farewell to Nancy Wake, the White Mouse who ran rings around the Nazis*, The Guardian, August 2011.

[483] R. R. Leonhard*, Undergrounds in Insurgent, Revolutionary and Resistance Warfare*, United States Army Special Operations Command (USASOC), Second Edition, Fort Bragg, NC, 2013, p.48.

[484] See R. Vargas, *The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the Illicit Drug Trade*, Transnational Institute Policy Briefing, June 1999, available online at: https://www.tni.org/en/publication/the-revolutionary-armed-forces-of-colombia-farc-and-the-illicit-drug-trade.

[485] F. Ernst, '*The training stays with you': the elite Mexican soldiers recruited by cartels*, The Guardian, February 2018, available online at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/feb/10/mexico-drug-cartels-soldiers-military.

[486] Moreover, photographs taken with high-end Digital Single Lens Reflex cameras and telephoto lenses are easily uploaded and shared using only a Secure Digital (SD) card and laptop. These can be geotagged and integrated alongside other aids as part of the planning processes. Such methods are also increasingly and routinely being socialised, and not always in a covert manner. Although often exaggerated, television series and films continuously offer insights into some of the techniques and tools used by criminal and terrorist actors as part of their preparations. See for example: *The use of the Internet for terrorist purposes*, United Nations for Drugs and Crime, New York, 2012, pp.8-10, https://www.unodc.org/documents/frontpage/Use_of_Internet_for_Terrorist_Purposes.pdf, and T. Harding, *'Terrorists use Google Maps to Hit UK Troops'*, The Telegraph, January 2007, available online at: https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/1539401/Terrorists-use-Google-maps-to-hit-UK-troops.html.

harnessed by groups such as ISIS for the purposes of both aerial surveillance and as a weaponised means of delivering explosive payloads.[487] For organised crime groups, technology-enabled intelligence gathering may range from researching prospective markets – such as the price of commodities and contraband in any given location – to investigating border crossing points and/or more discrete disembarkation areas along coastlines. Modern connectivity also allows such organisations to identify, contact and recruit local 'insider' informants such as airport baggage handlers and dockworkers through company websites and social media who can, in turn, document and report on security measures and/or partake in criminal activities. More widely, insurgents, terrorists and criminals have demonstrated the value of both battlefield-specific communications capabilities – such as tactical Very High Frequency (VHF) radio sets – and more readily available mobile phones to coordinate tactical activity on the ground.[488] VHF radios, satellite phones and other 'off the shelf' solutions such as Global Positioning Systems (GPS) also constitute useful tools for organised crime groups seeking to arrange the movement of illicit goods, particularly in more remote areas with limited coverage.[489] This might include cross-decking drug consignments between vessels on the high seas, organising rendezvous and handovers in the desert, or dropping off contraband along rugged coastlines under the cover of darkness. Furthermore, groups can choose between readily downloadable encrypted mobile communication applications with self-destructing, 'secret chat' functions and custom-built secure devices for added operational protection.[490]

5.6 Internal and outsourced expertise and know-how

Taken together, many of the above levers of power and domains of activity point to the cross-cutting and growing importance of expertise and know-how as a clandestine 'force multiplier.' The specialist skills required within the context of setting up complex money laundering operations or developing offensive capabilities, a task described by Gary Ackerman as "complex engineering," have, as we have seen, catalysed specialised sub-networks and nodes characterised by high levels of professionalism and technical knowledge.[491] Indeed, the previously described case of IED manufacturing hints at the importance of niche skills within the context of planning and conducting more advanced asymmetric or clandestine operations. Whilst it is true that bomb-making technology has migrated in recent years, forensic and fingerprint evidence gathered as part of counter-IED efforts in Iraq and elsewhere have demonstrated that even here, multiple devices can be traced to the same manufacturer.[492]

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[487] This includes the use of the Chinese Skywalker Technologies-manufactured X8 drone, with its impressive two metre wingspan and high-definition camera. See C. Clover and E. Feng, *ISIS use of hobby drones as weapons tests Chinese makers, The Financial Times*, December 2017.

[488] ISIS fighters in Iraq were able to go one step beyond this when they captured US-made encrypted radio systems from the Iraqi army during their offensive in 2014.

[489] *Results of a Pilot Survey of Forty Selected Organized Criminal Groups in Sixteen Countries*, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, September 2002, p. 109.

[490] Illustratively, a large pan-European law enforcement operation conducted in 2020 uncovered the widespread use of EncroChat, an encrypted phone network consisting of a secure digital communication tool loaded onto ordinary smartphones, by criminal groups.
Dismantling of an Encrypted Network Sends Shockwaves through Organised Crime Groups Across Europe, Europol/Eurojust Joint Press Release, 2 July 2020,
https://www.europol.europa.eu/newsroom/news/dismantling-of-encrypted.
In a more traditional variation on this theme, SMS payment reference codes and receipts are at times issued by Hawaladar bankers as a means of validating and securing payments. See *The Role of Hawala and Other Similar Service Providers in Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing*, Financial Action Task Force, October 2013, p. 29.

[491] G. A. Ackerman, *Designing Danger: Complex Engineering by Violent Non-State Actors: Introduction to Special Issue*, Journal of Strategic Security, Vol. 9, No. 1, Spring 2016, pp. 1-11.

[492] See for example: C. Dillow, *To Catch a Bombmaker*, Popular Science, September 2015, available online at: https://www.popsci.com/to-catch-bomb-maker.

ISIS, moreover, established a model where explosive devices were made at scale in specifically designed mobile factories built for mass production. Although still requiring overall technical supervision and expertise, these were assembled by a workforce that included mechanics whose job consisted of making metal screws and bomb parts alongside an assembly crew staffed by forced labourers.[493] Some organisations, such as al Qaeda, have traded on their expertise, offering training and know-how to localised franchises around the world.[494] Again, knowledge ranging from the selection of weapon systems to tactical manoeuvring can often be traced back to state actors. Illustratively, Mujahideen Ahmed Shah Massoud and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar both received such training from the Pakistani intelligence service (ISI), whilst Iran's provision of support to proxies such as Hezbollah has gone far beyond the simple provision of IED know-how to include missiles.

Niche skills and expertise arguably play an even more critical role within the context of transnational organised crime networks. As previously argued, illicit enterprises increasingly rely on a web of specialist service providers and sectors who interact and trade with one another based on their everyday business needs and respective 'value added' skills. This means that each specialised sector or provider typically has its own unique set of skills that it can monetise as part of international production processes or supply-chains. The narcotics business, for example, is reliant on laboratory technicians and chemists to produce commodities such as heroin, cocaine and synthetic drugs. In the case of the heroin trade, this includes individuals who have the knowledge and expertise to first turn wet opium extracted from poppies into morphine base through a reduction process involving hot water, lime and ammonium chloride and, subsequently, convert the morphine into heroin.[495] Whilst heroin can technically be produced through crude means and field laboratories, specialist know-how is particularly important in order to produce higher-purity variations of the drug intended for high-paying customers in Western markets. Such a process might involve more sophisticated equipment such as litmus paper, stainless steel pots, propane gas ovens, Bunsen burners, vacuum pumps and electric drying ovens.[496] Moreover, the need for specific precursor chemicals such as Acetic Anhydride has effectively resulted in the creation of dedicated precursor supply chains comprising specialised smuggling networks and front organisations such as pharmaceutical supply companies.[497]

The need for – and leveraging of - specialist services and products is also apparent within the context of professional counterfeiters. Counterfeiting is arguably one of the oldest forms of criminal services alongside smuggling. Historical accounts, for example, point to the use of fake official documents in the Roman empire – a phenomenon that triggered a stern response by way of the highly punitive law of Lucius Cornelius Sulla.[498] In 15th Century Japan, Honoi merchants trading on the routes connecting Kyoto to north-eastern Japan sought to

[493] E. Solomon and S. Jones, *Isis' bomb-making expertise leaves lethal legacy*, The Financial Times, October 2016.
[494] B. Lia, *Al-Qaida's Appeal: Understanding its Unique Selling Points*, Perspectives on Terrorism, Vol. 2, No. 8, Terrorism Research Initiative, University of Leiden, 2008, available online at: http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/44/html.
[495] The latter synthesis involves a process that requires around twelve to fourteen hours to complete as well as a number of precursor chemicals, chief amongst which is Acetic Anhydride.
See U. Zerell *et a*l., *Documentation of a heroin manufacturing process in Afghanistan*, Bulletin on Narcotics, Volume LVII, No. 1&2, 2005, pp. 11-31.
[496] *Opium Poppy Cultivation and Heroin Processing in Southeast Asia*, Drug Enforcement Administration Office of Intelligence, U.S. Department of Justice, September 1992, p. 15.
[497] See for example *Financial flows linked to the production and trafficking of Afghan Opiates*, Financial Action Task Force, Report, June 2014, pp. 38-39
[498] D. Potolinca *et al.*, *The Study of Documents Counterfeit Procedures by Analyzing the Security Elements*, International Journal of Criminal Investigation, Vol. 2, Issue 3, p. 221.

consolidate their rights and prerogative as traders by forging imperial decrees.[499] During World War II, counterfeit documents – passports, work passes, firearm licenses and travel permits – were manufactured at an almost industrial scale by the Allies in specialised facilities for partisans and special operations agents as well as for the purpose of counter-German propaganda.[500] Forgers and counterfeiters, however, have come into their own in the modern age, servicing high levels of demand on the black market and aided by technological aids such as readily-available editing software and printers. Here, key geographic centres stand out in the international illicit services market. Illustratively, Bangkok's Little Arabia district may well have established itself as a global hub for fake passports with Australian, British and American versions fetching up to US $2,500.[501] Whilst particularly popular with irregular migrants, fake identity documents are also a critical enabler for both terrorists and organised criminals as well as for money laundering activity.

Returning to a familiar theme, the migration of expertise and knowledge between organisations has clearly been catalysed by globalisation, international trade and the proliferation of modern communication technologies. Indeed, knowledge has become a prized commodity that can be traded or purchased in its own right on the global black market. Around the same time as al Qaeda was sending emissaries and trainers to upskill different international franchises in the use of terrorist tactics, the Pakistani Nuclear scientist Abdul Qadeer (aka 'AQ') Khan was proliferating uranium enrichment technology to Iran, North Korea and Libya, sparking fears within the international community that nuclear capabilities and knowledge could eventually be acquired by terrorist organisations.[502] The purchase of knowledge, including through the employment of specialist consultants, is also apparent within the context of the global criminal economy. Illustratively, drug trafficking organisations in the Netherlands have at different times sought to acquire cocaine-processing expertise from Colombian groups,[503] whilst Russian and Ukrainian cybercrime specialists have effectively become the go-to providers for malware code and cyberweapons. Taken together therefore, these various dynamics point to an increasingly connected ecosystem in which all manner of organisation can source expert services from specialists as part of an integrated and highly lucrative marketplace.

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the wide range of levers available to clandestine non-state actor seeking to project power, including transnationally. Speaking to this thesis' third hypothesis and drawing on both theoretical sources and empirical analysis, it showed how these actors have shown a propensity to both develop and combine capabilities and instruments in a way that is, at least conceptually, not too dissimilar to the approaches adopted by states, albeit typically at a smaller scale. This investigation also built on the previous examination of clandestine organisational structures and operating models, not least because specific functions and

[499] H. Tonomura, *Forging the Past: Medieval Counterfeit Documents*, Monumenta Nipponica, Vol.40, No.1, Sophia University, Spring 1985, pp. 69-70.
[500] One of the more imaginative examples was a fake Hitler passport doctored to make him look Jewish and carrying a Palestinian visa. "Small moustache," it noted, under the 'distinguishing features' section. See '*Adolphe Hitler's Fake Passport*', The National Archives, available online at: https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/museum/item.asp?item_id=46.
[501] S. Berger, *Welcome to Bangkok, the capital of forgery*, The Telegraph, August 2005, available online at: https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/thailand/1497014/Welcome-to-Bangkok-the-capital-of-forgery.html.
[502] See for example C. Collins and D. Frantz, T*he Long Shadow of A.Q. Khan: How One Scientist Helped the World Go Nuclear, Foreign Affairs*, January 2018.
[503] See for example D. Zaitch, *Trafficking Cocaine: Colombian Drug Entrepreneurs in the Netherlands*, Studies of Organised Crime, Kluwer Law International, The Hague, 2002, p. 290 and J. M. Bunck and M. R. Fowler, *Bribes, Bullets and Intimidation: Drug Trafficking and the Law in Central America*, Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012, p. 27.

capabilities often call for a degree of specialisation and professionalization, including with respect to the development of offensive weaponry, transport solutions, intelligence-gathering and financial-transfer systems. Of course, such specialisation can also be outsourced or delegated to external third-party providers and professional enablers, some of whom may work concurrently for a number of different clandestine organisations. This pattern introduces further granularity within the context of the thesis' first hypothesis, specifically with respect to the character of inter-non-state actor partnerships. Cross-network interlinkages, this chapter has argued, are on the rise in the digital era, with online platforms, tools and mediums offering distinct advantages regarding the acquisition of capabilities, long-distance coordination of clandestine activities and the dissemination of propaganda and strategic communications content. More broadly, the analysis provided over the course of the last three chapters has highlighted how clandestine non-state actors, whilst smaller and weaker than states in the conventional sense, have other tools at their disposal, including flexibly and adaptability, arguably reflecting what Foucault once described as the 'pluralist' nature of power.[504] Still, the various dynamics captured within the above framework require further empirical validation, which this thesis will now seek to achieve by applying the framework to the detailed examination of three groups operating in significantly different contexts.

[504] See H. T. Miller, Governmentality, *Pluralism, and Deconstruction*, Administrative Theory & Praxis, Vol.30, No.3, Taylor & Francis, pp. 363-368; and K. J. Heller, *Power, Subjectification and Resistance in Foucault*, SubStance, Vol. 25, No. 1, Issue 79, Johns Hopkins University Press ,1996, pp. 78-110.

Part III: Applying the framework – case study analysis

CHAPTER 6 – The 'Ndrangheta

The 'Ndrangheta is one of the least studied branches of the Italian Mafia, despite arguably having developed considerable power within the clandestine international criminal system. This underpins its value as a case study with respect to examining the thesis' central research question, not least given its role in challenging the authority of the Italian state all the while demonstrating the ability to expand into new territories. The organisation also displays many of the characteristics of a political actor (hypothesis 1); demonstrates high levels of organisational agility (hypothesis 2); and draws on a reasonably wide spectrum of levers of influence in pursuit of its interests (hypothesis 3). In turn, this chapter, the first of three granular case studies, builds on the analytical framework described in Chapters 3-5 as the basis for investigation and is therefore organised around its levels and accompanying categories of analysis. The production of this case study adhered to the process described in the methodology (see Chapter 1), including with respect to collecting, cataloguing, grouping and synthesising relevant data drawn from a wide range of sources. Primary research drew on judicial sources, including court files and indictments; law enforcement wiretap logs and surveillance footage; financial and intelligence reporting, including from the Italian Direzione Investigativa Antimafia (DIA), Europol, Eurojust, German Federal Police and Australian Federal Police; Italian chamber of commerce data; and parliamentary enquiry materials. This was bolstered by analysis of investigative journalism sources, media articles and academic publications in order to produce a holistic picture of the object of study. The analysis excluded sources that did not contain any form of empirical evidence supporting their claims or assessments (a number of media articles fell short in this respect). Through the above approach, the chapter sheds light on the Mafia organisation's sprawling interests, wide-ranging relationships and highly structured financial investments, offering insights into the inner workings of a contemporary cross-border clandestine organisation. Furthermore, and returning to some of the notions introduced in Chapter 2, it offers a useful basis for exploring the concept of an alternative clandestine international 'order' within which protagonists are able to wield power at scale as well as reshape existing social and political systems from within.

6.1 Overview: historical evolution of the 'Ndrangheta

The roots of the 'Ndrangheta branch of the Italian Mafia run deep in Calabrian society. Its origins are the subject of some debate within the literature, but can be traced at least to the mid-19th century, where it was known under different names, including, *inter alia*, the *Piccotteria* (often used before the 1950s) and *Onorata Società*.[505] The organisation's early activities are largely undocumented but it is likely that these included a combination of local self-protection, social services provision and extortion, resembling those of the Cosa Nostra (Sicilian Mafia), which received greater attention in the period following Italian Unification.[506] Unsurprisingly – and in a similar vein to other Mafia branches – the 'Ndrangheta's emergence and rise appears closely correlated with a lack of state presence, economic marginalisation and political exclusion. Corrado Alvaro, the mid-10th Century Calabrian novelist, screen writer and playwriter highlighted its ascent as a product of a failure in Italian governance and statecraft in the region, including the state's inability to maintain justice and order.[507] Letizia Paoli, meanwhile, argues that mafia associations developed post Italian state formation because "national systems of power expanded without fully subordinating local systems of

[505] See for example F. Truzzoli, *The 'Ndrangheta: The current state of historical research*, Modern Italy, Vol. 16, No. 3, pp. 363-383.
[506] See also F. Benigno, *Rethinking the Origins of the Sicilian 'Mafia': A New Interpretation*, *Crime,* Histoire & Sociétés / Crime, History & Societies*, Vol.* 22, No. 1, 2018, pp. 107–30.
[507] A. Phillips, *Corrado Alvaro and the Calabrian mafia: a critical case study of the use of literary and journalistic texts in research on Italian organized crime*, in M. Neumann and C. Elsenbroich, Trends in Organized Crime, Vol. 20, Issues 1-2, June 2017, pp. 179- 195.

power" to the extent that the "central state had to rely on local landlords and mafia coalitions if it wanted to govern some areas at all."[508] The organisation remained hidden throughout the first part of the 20th Century, in no small part because of Benito Mussolini's aversion to the mafia, which he saw as a direct threat to his fascist regime and the authority of the state. particularly in Sicily.[509] In what would become an established theme, the regime's focus on Sicily benefitted the 'Ndrangheta, who was less clearly in the crosshairs of state anti-mafia efforts. However, like other mafias, it cultivated an implicit rejection of the (formal) state, regardless of the regime of the day – a position that would culminate in internal discussions on fomenting a *coup d'état* in 1969.[510]

Slightly better documented is the rapid rise of the 'Ndrangheta (as it was now increasingly referred to) from the 1950s onwards, when it expanded its activities and geographical reach aided by a wave of economic migration from Calabria to northern Italy and beyond.[511] Its involvement in more modern forms of transnational criminal activities began with the import of contraband tobacco and cigarettes, which were subsequently sold on the lucrative Italian market at prices that undercut those imposed by the state.[512] The Calabrian Mafia continued its growth over the subsequent three decades, increasingly tightening its hold over the local economic and political fabric in its 'home' territory all the while expanding its interests further afield, both in northern Italy and internationally. Official inquiry documents demonstrate how the leadership's decision to establish links with Freemasonry in the mid-1970s offered a mechanism through which to forge connections with political and professional circles. Indeed, Masonic lodges where well represented by the sectors and professions that the Mafia sought to access: traders, lawyers, notaries, entrepreneurs, political representatives and magistrates.[513] Paradoxically, Italian policy initiatives aimed at encouraging economic stimulus in the southern Mezzogiorno region (of which Calabria is part), which started in the 1980s, created significant opportunities for the 'Ndrangheta to leverage its new contacts and influence for the purposes of infiltrating public procurement processes and manoeuvring into the construction and infrastructure development business.[514] At play here was a hybrid, diversified dynamic in which the Mafia both operated as a major player within the formal economy while generating revenue from 'conventional' organised crime activity.

This dual, blended approach would become the blueprint for the Mafia's operating model in the early 1990s and 2000s. With the Italian government distracted by a bloody war against the Cosa Nostra, the 'Ndrangheta began expanding its trafficking activities into the drugs trade, particularly the cocaine distribution business, and reinvesting profits within (primarily) the construction and hospitality sectors. The 1990s witnessed a deepening of the organisation's interests and holdings in northern Italy, particularly Milan and Lombardy – significant financial and industrial centres that further benefited from their geographical proximity to Swiss and Austrian money laundering centres.[515] Moreover, the tectonic shifts and strategic opportunities

[508] L. Paoli. *Crime, Italian Style*, Daedalus, Vol. 130, No. 3, Italy: Resilient and Vulnerable, Volume II: Politics and Society (Summer, 2001), p. 173
[509] A. Gigantino, *Il Duce and the Mafia: Mussolini's Hatred for the Mafia and the American Alliance with Organized Crime,* The Histories, Vol. 4, Issue 1, Article 3, 2019, p. 2.
[510] E. Ciconte, *Origins and Development of the 'Ndrangheta* in N. Serenate (ed.), *The 'Ndrangheta and Sacra Corona Unita: The History, Organization and Operations of Two Unknown Mafia Groups*, Studies of Organized Crime, Vol. 12, 2014, p. 41.
[511] See for example P. Pinotti, *The Economic Costs of Organised Crime: Evidence from Southern Italy*, The Economic Journal, Vol. 125, No. 586, 2015, pp. 203–32.
[512] E. Ciconte, p. 38.
[513] *Commissione Parlamentare Di Inchiesta Sul Fenomeno Della Criminalita Organizzara Mafioso O Similare*, Camera Dei Deputati, Doc. XXIII No. 5 October 2006, p. 32.
[514] E. Ciconte, p.42. For a detailed analysis of the wider issues, including clientelism, in the region see C. Trigilia, *Why the Italian Mezzogiorno did not Achieve a Sustainable Growth*, Social Capital and Political Constraints, Cambio, Anno 2, No. 10, January 2016, pp.137-148.
[515] E. Ciconte, pp. 42-43.

that followed the fall of the Berlin Wall did not go unnoticed to the organisation, who swooped-in to secure investments during the wave of privatisation that accompanied the reunification of Germany.[516] As well as diversification, such economic pursuits amounted to an industrial-scale money laundering operation – a bridge between criminal income and long-term business acquisitions. Since the early 2000s, the 'Ndrangheta has grown into one of the most formidable criminal organisations in the world, controlling a large segment of cocaine wholesale distribution in Europe. This includes a deep-rooted presence across Italy as well as external 'colonies' in Western Europe (particularly in Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and the Iberian Peninsula), Australia, Canada and Latin America.

6.2 Policy choices and strategic direction

Strategic aims and interests

Whilst the aims and interests of the 'Ndrangheta have evolved significantly since the organisation's relatively humble beginnings, its identity and, to a significant extent, powerbase remain rooted in rural Calabria. Its overarching *raison d'être* flows from the organisation's historical focus on establishing alternative governance systems within a region that has suffered from chronic underinvestment by the state. Although it has become deeply involved in criminal activities, its aims are therefore more nuanced than the simple accumulation of wealth. Instead, 'Ndrangheta criminal activities arguably constitute the mechanism through which to accumulate hegemonic power, *de facto* territorial control and (quasi) sovereign status – a phenomenon described by Umberto Santino as 'territorial domination.'[517] In this respect, such illicit activities perhaps simply constitute a Clausewitzian-style continuation of policy by other means, including a vehicle for securing as well as expanding its immediate sphere of political and social influence. This focus *inter alia* explains the attention devoted to establishing the organisation's 'domestic' fiefdom on its original territory.[518]

Power, governance and territorial control are therefore not so much pursued by establishing formal control over the institutions of the state (as might be the aim of insurgencies and other subversive groups) but rather, by exercising influence over key sectors of society and exhibiting a shadow form of governance.[519] An additional feature of this sort of neo-feudal, dominion-based calculus is the aim of positioning the organisation's bosses as the 'true' influencers, authorities, benefactors and decision-makers within centres of power. Perhaps most critically, the establishment of a 'home' powerbase offers the organisation with a platform through which to organise, orchestrate and coordinate the projection of power at scale further afield using proven formulas and methods. Thus, a growing body of evidence describes the 'colonial' nature of the organisation's evolution and expeditionary ventures, using its clan structure as the main vehicle for securing strategic entry points into new economic and political markets.[520] The organisation's expansionist policy is intertwined with its primary interests, namely the ability secure power, territory and influence as well as gradually expand its sphere of influence through new political and trade relations and control over economic supply chains. Its strategic approach to pursuing these interests has gravitated heavily around a logic of infiltration and co-option, weaving itself into the political, social and economic fabric of territories and securing the mantle of (actual) custodians of power (a theme that will be explored in more detail subsequently).

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[516] See for example A. Montanari and S. Pignedoli, *Così La Mafia Ha Conquistato La Germania (Grazie Anche Alla Caduta Del Muro Di Berlino)*, L'Espresso Republica, 21 March 2019.
[517] U. Santino, *Studying Mafias in Sicily*, Sociologica, Fascicolo 2, Maggio-Agosto 2011, p. 6
[518] L. Paoli, p. 163
[519] R. Siebert, *Mafia and Daily Life: The Evolution of Gender and Generational Relationships*, in N. Serenata (ed.), p. 15.
[520] See for example *Italian Organised Crime Threat Assessment*, EUROPOL, June 2013, p. 11.

Geographical spheres of influence and territorial control

The geographical centres within which 'Ndrangheta has secured influence and/or control can be placed in four broad categories. The first of these consists of its primary stronghold within Reggio Calabria in the Mezzogiorno, which spreads out from the historical town of San Luca, considered by many observers and the Italian intelligence services to be the organisation's capital, "cradle [...] and epicentre."[521] Similar local strongholds include the village of Polsi, reputed for hosting strategic leadership meetings and situated twenty kilometres west of San Luca, as well as Lamezia Terme, Platì, Taurianova and Rosarno and Ionian coastal towns such as Siderno (home to the so-called Siderno Group within the organisation), amongst other municipalities.[522] Illustratively, an Italian anti-Mafia law allowing the central government to 'strike off' municipalities with a strong mafia presence removed over thirty such dissolved municipal councils in Calabria alone, providing a sense of the scale of social embeddedness within the region.[523] Still in the region, and situated on Calabria's opposing maritime flank to Siderno, the strategic port of Gioia Tauro constitutes an important node for the organisation given its role as a trading and commodity import hub and, therefore, critical source of revenue – a pattern which it emulated in other trade centres further afield.

Coming closely behind Calabria are the organisation's footholds in northern Italy, within which it has invested and expanded heavily over the decades. Its presence in the northern territories reflects a combination of historical and strategic factors. Firstly, these were traditionally favoured by mafia bosses who had been banished from southern territories at a time of significant migration from southern Italy.[524] Secondly, their stronger economy and industry base represented a logical environment for the acquisition of assets and reinvestment of proceeds within the formal economy. Thirdly, their proximity to northern European countries, provided a logical bridge into markets situated within the 'near abroad.' Thus, the organisation's economic expansion began in Milan during the 1960s in the form of interest in the construction sector and public contracting and continued to the extent that it secured a near monopoly on the regions of Lombardy, Piedmont, Valle d'Aosta (on the French and Swiss borders) as well as Lazio.[525] Rome, meanwhile, constitutes another key node within the organisation's strategic plans, resulting in heavy investment within the capital city's sprawling hospitality and restauration sectors.

The third geographical category of territories within which the 'Ndrangheta projects influence consists of the 'near abroad,' or the many European territories in which the organisation has established a deep presence through a combination of partnerships, criminal activities and economic investment. Its footprint can be traced clearly across Western Europe, including to the Netherlands, where the organisation has secured a presence in strategic nodes such as the port city of Rotterdam as well as in Amsterdam. Belgium, a country deeply infiltrated by 'Ndrangheta clans, has witnessed a growing presence in the regions surrounding Mons,

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[521] J. Hopper, *Silence on the Street of Calabria's Mafia Capital as Deadly Feud Crosses Borders*, The Guardian, 17 August 2007. See also J. Dickie, *Mafia and Prostitution in Calabria, c.1880—c.1940*, *Past & Present*, no. 232, August 2016, pp. 203–36.

[522] C. Anesi and L. Bagnoli, *Bitter Beauty: A Pilgrimage to the Birthplace of the 'Ndrangheta, Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP)*, 21 September 2018. Distances calculated via Google Maps.

[523] N.D. Coniglio *et al*, *Organized Crime, Migration and Human Capital Formation: Evidence from the South of Italy*, Southern Europe Research in Economic Studies, Working Paper No. 0028, January 2010, p. 10.
It is possible, in turn, that the dissolution of these councils has played into the 'Ndrangheta's narrative and, more specifically, the general neglect and absence of (formal) state governance across the region, although such a hypothesis would require further corroboration.

[524] E.G. Parini, *'Ndrangheta. Multilevel Criminal System of Power and Economic Accumulation,* in N. Serenate (ed.), p. 58.

[525] E. Ciconte, p. 35

Charleroi and Liège.[526] Unsurprisingly, the organisation has sprung up across the Iberian Peninsula, with Spain constituting an important logistics and transhipment hub for the importation of narcotics as well as a popular destination alongside Portugal for senior members on the run.[527] The organisation's activities are also visible in the United Kingdom, whose company formation rules offer a relatively simple means of establishing front corporations, as well as in Switzerland, Malta and France (most visibly within the regions of Alpes, Provence and Côte d'Azur and the cities of Grenoble and Paris).[528]

The case of Germany, meanwhile, provides a particular vivid illustration of its reach and 'out of area' influence, including via bastions of economic control. The German Federal Police (Bundeskriminalamt or BKA), for example, highlights its position as the "strongest of the Italian Mafia Groups in Germany" with a footprint that spans across the German states of Bavaria, Baden-Württemberg, North Rhine-Westphalia and Hesse as well as more locally within the cities of Leipzig, Erfurt, Berlin, Bremen, Frankfurt, Stuttgart and Hamburg.[529] As we have seen, and in a pattern that shares some characteristics with the rise of modern Russian kleptocrats and organised crime, the mafia branch adroitly exploited Germany's transition to a market economy in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union all the while cementing its influence over industrial and transport hubs.[530] In a logical continuation of this theme the organisation's territory in eastern Germany has provided it with a springboard from which to expand into Eastern European countries, including Slovenia and Romania.[531]

Fourthly, and as already alluded to, the 'Ndrangheta has established a sizeable 'forward' presence extending across the Atlantic and beyond. Unsurprisingly, this has involved clans operating in Latin American cocaine production and export countries, including Colombia, Ecuador, Bolivia, Mexico, Brazil, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Ecuador, the intricacies of which will be returned to in subsequent sections.[532] Although the organisation has followed a different evolution to the well documented evolution of the Cosa Nostra within the United States harking back to the Italian migration wave in the late nineteenth century, it nevertheless laid down its own roots in North America, with an early focus on Canada. Illustratively, some sources suggest that the 'Ndrangheta may have been present in Hamilton, located south of Toronto on Lake Ontario, since the early 20th Century.[533] Other sources, meanwhile, point to a more consolidated pattern of establishing gambling and extortion operations in Canada from the 1950s (a number of which appear to have been run out of a pasta factory in Toronto).[534]

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[526] *Relazione Semestral Al Parlamento*, Direzione Investigativa Antimafia (DIA), Gennaio – Giugno 2021, pp. 355-357.
[527] A senior member of the Pelle Clan was captured in Lisbon in March 2021. Ibid. p. 44.
[528] See for example M. Castigliani, *France, From French Connection to Narco-Banditry. And the judge surrenders: "it's like fighting windmills"*, il Fatto Quotidiano, https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/longform/mafia-and-organized-crime-in-europe/focus/france/.
[529] '*Ndrangheta aus Kalabrien*, Bundeskriminalamt (BKA), https://www.bka.de/DE/UnsereAufgaben/Deliktsbereiche/OrganisierteKriminalitaet/ok.html, and A. Ulrich, *Die ´Ndrangheta in Deutschland*, Bundeskriminalamt (BKA), December 2011.
[530] M. Bedetti, *L'espansione Della 'Ndrangheta In Germania: Lineamenti Di Un Modello Interpretativo*, Cross Vol.7 No.4, 2021, p.126. See also G. Dimore, *Mafia rushed through gap in the Berlin Wall*, Financial Times, 13 November 2009.
[531] A. Candito, *'Ndrangheta, smantellato l'impero degli imprenditori dei clan tra Italia e Europa dell'Est. Arrestate 12 persone, indagato ex calciatore*, la Repubblica, 26 July 2022. See also DIA 2021, p.361.
[532] See for example C. Anesi *et al*, *Armed and Dangerous: Inside the 'Ndrangheta's Intercontinental Cocaine Pipeline*, Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, 5 August 2021, https://www.occrp.org/en/ndrangheta/armed-and-dangerous-inside-the-ndranghetas-intercontinental-cocaine-pipeline.
[533] See for example A. Humphreys, *Murdered Mob Boss Pat Musitano Symbolized Ontario's Mafia with his Gangster Chic – and the Mayhem the Shadowed Him*, The National Post 12 July 2020, https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/murdered-mob-boss-pat-musitano-symbolized-ontarios-mafia-with-his-gangster-chic-and-the-mayhem-that-shadowed-him.
[534] E.G. Parini, p. 53.

A similar dynamic involving 'Ndrangheta families occurred in Australia from the 1970s onwards, with recent Australian Federal Police (AFP) intelligence pointing to the existence of fourteen confirmed clans across the country operating under a "cloak of secrecy" in close cooperation with other organised crime groups, including patched members of outlaw motorcycle gangs.[535] In turn, the character of the relationships forged within these different theatres of influence merits further examination.

External relations and alliances

The 'Ndrangheta's geographical reach and expansion into clearly defined regions and markets reflects many of the characteristics of the traditional foreign policy calculations of state actors, including the means through which to project power and pursue interests beyond one's immediate sphere of control. Clearly however, such ventures would not be possible without securing strategic relationships with local partners within different operating contexts. Critically, this has involved forging agreements, alliances and trading partnerships with other non-state actors in what effectively amounts to power blocks of clandestine influence within the (shadow) international system. One of the most illustrative and important alliances brokered by the organisation has been its strategic relationship with Albanian organised crime groups, which, perhaps ironically, was arguably born out of more 'domestic' interactions. Indeed, commentators have pointed to Calabria's community of Albanians of ethnic origin born out of refugee and migrant flows dating back to the Ottoman invasion of Albania in the mid-fifteenth century.[536] Regardless of its origins, the 'Ndrangheta's partnership with Albanian organised crime groups today lies at the heart of the multi-billion European cocaine import business. Far beyond a simple 'pax mafiosa' involving tacit acceptance of each other's operations, the two actors actively cooperate as part of an allied power block that shares key functions along the supply chain.[537]

Similarly, the 'Ndrangheta appears to have collaborated with – and respected the sphere of influence of – other mafia branches, most notably the Sicilian Cosa Nostra, since at least the early 1990s.[538] Despite their geographical proximity, the two organisations have not only accepted each other's territorial claims but appear to have at the very least colluded and pooled resources via a policy of 'mutual aid,'[539] including with respect to shared logistical enablers and access in *inter alia* Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands and Spain.[540] Paoli, meanwhile, argues that the relationship extends even deeper, to the point of involving shared cultural codes.[541] What is clear is that the 'Ndrangheta learned valuable lessons from observing the actions of the Cosa Nostra, including the latter's costly war waged against the Italian state, which gripped public attention in the 1980s and early 1990s.[542] Critically, it

[535] *AFP to target Italian organised crime and money laundering a year on from Operation Ironside*, Australian Federal Police (AFP), 7 June 2022, https://www.afp.gov.au/news-media/media-releases/afp-target-italian-organised-crime-and-money-laundering-year-operation.
[536] N. D. Coniglio *et al*, p. 10.
[537] See also K. Lala, *Albanian Crime Story: Hostage to the Cocaine Supply Chain*, Balkan Insight, 1 July 2021, https://balkaninsight.com/2021/07/01/albanian-crime-story-hostage-to-the-cocaine-supply-chain/.
[538] E.G. Parini, p. 52.
[539] L. Paoli, *Mafia Brotherhoods: Organized Crime, Italian Style*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 19.
[540] *Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry into Mafia-related and other criminal organizations*, Atti Parlementari, Camera Deputati, 21 February 2018, p. 60.
[541] See L. Paoli, *Fratelli di Mafia: Cosa Nostra e 'Ndrangheta*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2000, pp. 19-76.
[542] In the mid-1990s the Sicilian Cosa Nostra opted to veer away from a disastrous campaign of war against the state which it waged from 1989 to 1993 to thwart the passing of draconian anti-Mafia legislation. The group's new leader, Bernardo Provenzano, considered the violent tactics employed by his predecessor, Totò Riina, to be bad for business. Indeed, state retaliation for high-profile bombings such as the assassination of anti-Mafia judges Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino had brought the

understood that remaining in the shadows and pursuing a quiet infiltration strategy constituted a more judicious approach than high-visibility acts such as assassinating judges and prosecutors.[543] Moreover, pressure exerted on the Cosa Nostra as a result of its violent campaign forced the organisation to reduce its presence in some territories to the benefit of the 'Ndrangheta.[544] The Cosa Nostra arguably drew its own lessons from the ordeal when its then-leader, Bernardo Provenzano, switched tracks and opted for a 'submersion' strategy that emphasised discretion and reinvesting the proceeds of criminal activity into legitimate businesses ventures such as real estate, tourism and private health companies.[545] Beyond the Cosa Nostra, the 'Ndrangheta has also cooperated with the Camorra, including through the shared control of nightclubs on Lake Garda.[546]

In Latin America, and as alluded to previously, localised, trade-based partnerships are also discernible. Thus, the organisation has over the years entered in direct bilateral business arrangements with Colombian cocaine producers, which started with deals struck with Pablo Escobar's Medellin Cartel and today includes a lucrative trade agreement with the Clan de Gulfo cantered around bulk-buying narcotic consignments at source. The Clan, a hybrid between a drug cartel and paramilitary group with a strength of six thousand members and enjoying de facto control over swaths of territory in the Urabá region of Antioquia, Colombia, exerts control within in its own sphere of influence in a way that an external actor – even one as adept at the 'Ndrangheta – could not.[547] The organisation struck a similar deal with the Brazilian Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC), a major player in its own right with established ties to Bolivian cocaine paste producers, Paraguayan logisticians, ex-Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) guerrillas and the Lebanese Hezbollah (the latter of whom have risen as global experts and service providers in money laundering activity).[548] Similarly, the 'Ndrangheta appear to have developed an effective business relationship with Las Zetas, one of the most powerful Mexican cartels, further consolidating its presence within narcotics supply chains.[549] In effect, such external relations therefore add scale and breadth to the organisation's operations by providing it the ability to leverage the access and resources of trusted actors. Reciprocally, an Italian parliamentary inquiry detailing the reach of the Italian

group to the brink of annihilation. See for example L. Salvatore and D. McDonnell, *The Capture of Bernardo Provenzano*, Italian Politics, Vol. 22, 2006, pp. 249–262.

[543] R. Donadio, *Can Italy Defy Its Most Powerful Crime Syndicate?* The Atlantic, October 2020 Issue, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/10/italian-mafia-ndrangheta/615466/.

[544] See also R. Catanzaro and J. Castagna, *'A Watershed Year for Both the Mafia and the State'*, Italian Politics, Vol. 8, 1993, pp. 134–50.

[545] Provenzano conformed to the letter of this approach, driving a battered old car and dressing as a peasant farmer to avoid attracting attention See C. Longrigg, *Bernardo Provenzano Obituary*, The Guardian, July 14, 2016.

[546] U. Savona Ernesto and M. Riccardi (Eds.), *From illegal markets to legitimate businesses: the portfolio of organised crime in Europe*, Organised Crime Portfolio, Trento: Transcrime – Università degli Studi di Trento, 2015, p. 185.

[547] See for example *Leader of the Violent 'Clan Del Golfo's Multi-Billion Dollar Drug Trafficking Organization Extradited from Colombia to Face Federal Indictment*, United States Attorney's Office, United States Department of Justice, 5 May 2022, https://www.justice.gov/usao-edny/pr/leader-violent-clan-del-golfo-multi-billion-dollar-drug-trafficking-organization.

[548] See B. Harris, *How Brazil's Largest Crime Syndicate Built a Global Syndicate Built a Global Drug Empire*, Financial Times, 28 February 2022 and

United States Congressional testimony papers suggest a possible relationship between the 'Ndrangheta and Hezbollah, although this requires further corroboration. See D. Ottolenghi, *State Sponsors of Terrorism: An Examination of Iran's Global Terrorism Network*, House Homeland Security Committee, Foundation for Defense of Democracies, 17 April 2018, p. 30.

[549] See for example S. Corrao and F. Realacci, T*he Business Relationship Between Italy's Mafia and Mexico's Drug Cartels*, InSight Crime, 19 June 2014, https://insightcrime.org/news/analysis/the-business-relationship-between-italys-mafia-and-mexicos-drug-cartels.

Mafia explains how Central and South American narco-traffickers "consider the 'Ndrangheta a reliable partner flush with cash, and these characteristics have facilitated its globalisation."[550]

Beyond the business and power dividends of such alliances, access to new markets also offers, as Eurojust (the European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation) explains, a means of "exploiting legal differences between criminal jurisdictions [and] escaping attention, since each crime [...] may appear an isolated act rather than part of an international operation."[551]At the same time, the relations of the 'Ndrangheta with other clandestine non-state actors has also involved conflict as well as competition over both territory and resources. Illustratively, the organisation locked horns with the Camora for a time before establishing a more cooperative relationship. To be sure, judicial material demonstrates the extent to which the organisation is aware of strategic positioning in relation to other organisations – a pattern illustrated by a wiretap involving a conversation between two senior 'Ndrangheta members in which one conveys the need to expand operations in new markets "otherwise another group will take over."[552]

Strategic logic and sequencing

At a high level, commentators convincingly argue that the organisation's 'secret of success' consists of a "peculiar mixture of modernity and antiquity, operating as an extremely modern criminal organization whose investment strategy is flexible and very aggressive."[553] Accounts by the Italian Direzione Investigativa Antimafia (DIA) support this assessment, highlighting the organisation's "extraordinary speed in adapting archaic values to the needs of the present [and] knowing how to manage change with marked modernity."[554] Enzo Ciconte adds further nuance to this dynamic when pointing to the intricate logic of replicating or "transplanting" its original, localised operating model within new territory.[555] Critically this behaviour points towards the actions of a highly rational and calculated actor capable of adapting basic formulas – including the targeted use of instruments such as bribery and corruption – to erode the political fabric of the state all the while retaining its own particular signature blueprint for securing and projecting power.[556] This same blueprint reflects the unique combination of infiltration, co-option, social embeddedness and economic penetration: an 'art' refined over time in Calabria and then repackaged for export.

Once again, it is perhaps easiest to identify some of the more granular components of this strategic logic within the context of the 'Ndrangheta's local business dealings. Indeed, the organisation has demonstrated an acute understanding of both emerging opportunities and the activities of local business actors, keeping a finger on the pulse of commercial entry-points within the licit and illicit economy. Italian parliamentary documents highlight the extent to which "the clans in Reggio Calabria Province interfere heavily with every sector of the legal economy, from construction to commerce; from restaurants to transportation; and from the import-export of food products to tourism," all the while "taking on the direct management of various businesses."[557] Interestingly, an economic study by Banca D'Italia points to a propensity for the 'Ndrangheta to "enter firms in financial distress", whilst concluding that overall, such

[550] Atti Parlementari, Camera Deputati, 21 February 2018, p. 61.
[551] *Coordinated crackdown on 'Ndrangheta mafia in Europe*, European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation (Eurojust), 05 September 2018, www.eurojust.europa.eu/news/coordinated-crackdown-ndrangheta-mafia-europe.
[552] F. Calderoni, *The structure of drug trafficking mafias: The 'Ndrangheta and cocaine*, Crime, Law and Social Change, Vol. 58, Issue 3, December 2012, p. 13.
[553] N. D. Coniglio *et al*, p. 5.
[554] *Mafie, 'l'allarme della DIA Emergenza 'ndrangheta'*, La Republica, 24 September 2003
[555] E.G. Parini, p. 58.
[556] See also G. Gilligan, *Organised Crime and Corrupting the Political System*, Journal of Financial Crime, Vol. 7 No. 2, April 1999, pp. 147-154.
[557] Camera Dei Deputati, Doc. XXIII No.5 (2006), p. 61.

infiltrations "improved firms' performance […] by significantly increasing their revenues."[558] At the hyper-local (i.e., village) level, this infiltrative process likely involves a combination of exerting influence over local companies and business, including via a blend of financial incentives and coerced taxation such as so-called 'pizzo' taxes paid to avoid interference and retaliation. The organisation has also repeatedly undercut existing commerce by way of controlled entities or entrepreneurs trading below market rates, with the aim of driving out competition.[559]

One local entrepreneur who had worked under the control of a 'Ndrangheta clan described how the organisation's interference ranged from imposing specific conditions relating to managerial decisions and workforce planning to prohibiting bids on certain tenders.[560] Another Calabrian businessman described a familiar pattern where the assets (buildings, company vehicles and so on) of those that resisted the mafia were destroyed or burnt. "You can't sell an apartment without paying them," he explained. "You can't open a business without their permission [and] the majority [of people] simply adapt to the system."[561] This approach, which inevitably has a distortive economic effect, essentially consists of 'suffocating' market forces within local economies, ensuring that the mafia organisation emerges as the dominant player within (micro) commercial ecosystems. It thus effectively amounts to "altering the rules, destroying healthy companies [and] preventing the creation of new economic companies."[562] *De facto* control over local enterprises also provides access to municipal public procurement contracts, and in-so-doing, a means through which to generate a track-record of delivering projects that can be leveraged to bid for tenders further afield.

Thus, from at least the 1970s onwards the organisation began to extend its infiltrative approach to larger projects across multiple sectors, including within northern Italy. As Europol explains, this process was aided in no small part by "increasing local or regional autonomy in crucial sectors such as the health system and public tenders" which, in turn, "facilitated the diversion of public funds" in a way that could be "immediately exploited by [the] deeply infiltrated 'Ndrangheta."[563] Cinconte adds that the organisation both began to extend its influence within larger national companies and, in the process, "deprovincialized" itself to the extent that it was no longer "locked in the narrow confines of its origins, in the recesses of rural society."[564] This dynamic also supports Paoli's wider treatise on mafia behaviour, which posits that groups evolve from "simply demanding tribute from activities in their territories" to "directly influencing the bidding process of large-scale public works for the benefit of firms controlled by mafia groups or their members."[565] As already alluded to, this pattern began to be replicated in new markets outside of Italy, including in Western Europe and North America. In an approach akin to achieving scale, the organisation set about implanting "perfect copies of its essential structures in [new] territories" in line with its longer-term strategy.[566]

Such economic expansion could not be possible without an accompanying – or, perhaps more accurately, a fundamentally interconnected – political strategy. Indeed, the development of close ties with or, depending on the context, co-option of the local political elite has been a

[558] L. Mirenda et al., *The real effects of 'ndrangheta: firm-level evidence*, Temi di discussion (Working Papers) No. 1235, Banka D'Italia – Eurosistema, October 2019, p.30.
[559] E.G. Parini, p. 55.
[560] M. Guerci *et al*., *Organized Crime and Employment Relations: A Personal Story of 'Ndrangheta Control on Employment Relations Management Practices in Southern Italy*, Work, Employment and Society, Vol. 36, Issue 4, July 2021, pp. 758-768.
[561] M. Johnson, *How the Mafia infiltrated Italy's hospitals and laundered the profits globally*, Financial Times, 9 July 2022.
[562] E. Ciconte, p. 42.
[563] *Italian Organized Crime Threat Assessment*, EUROPOL, The Hague, June 2013, p. 11.
[564] E. Ciconte, p. 40.
[565] L. Paoli, p. 175.
[566] EUROPOL *Italian Organized Crime Threat Assessment*, p. 11.

key component of the 'Ndrangheta's 'success story'. Once again, the more detailed mechanics of the organisation's political approach are best understood through an examination of its local activities. Such an investigation demonstrates the extent to which the type of economic machinations described above are themselves political in so far as the control of public financial resources as well as local commerce provides a vehicle for influencing the daily management of municipal affairs. Locally, city councils represent the intersection of the everyday needs of the citizen and formal governance structures: the most direct interface between the political system and the people. The desired condition, Parini explains, is one in which mafia power is defined (and, therefore, accepted), where citizens in effect become subjects of that power and where the organisation's 'territorial domain' is confirmed.[567] Perhaps for this reason Anna Sergi suggests that the 'Ndrangheta's behaviour in Reggio Calabria goes further than infiltration, blurring the lines between criminality and politics and essentially amounting to what she refers to as a "concurrent governance capacity" that is "endemic and systematic, but also felt as ineluctable and rationally accepted, wanted and endured by both mafiosi and politicians."[568]

The 'Ndrangheta's process of co-opting or, to use a term favoured by some political scientists, 'capturing' the local political establishment has involved a combination of methods. The earlier cited example of gaining access to local politicians through affiliation with Calabrian Masonic lodges fits within a wider pattern of behaviour of developing ties with public officials that also includes what the Direzione Nazionale Antimafia (DNA) refers to as targeted attempts to enter in pre-electoral agreements with local authorities.[569] As might be expected, efforts to exert influence over municipal councils appear to be particularly acute in localities deemed to be of strategic value, such as Lamezia Terme, Calabria's third largest city and home to an international airport, and the port city of Gioia Tauro, which was subject to election tampering.[570] Indeed, Europol reporting points to a carefully blended cocktail of bribes and threats as the mechanism for swaying votes and determining the outcome of local administrative elections and placing strawmen in key positions with the ability to "divert public funds, rig public tenders and despoil the budget of the administration they run."[571] Paradoxically, such an approach also feeds into the organisation's narrative of public sector inefficiency and "cumbersome and distant bureaucracy" in contrast to the "far more brisk and efficient management of the ['Ndrangheta] clans."[572] It therefore has a vested interest in "keeping [the region] isolated and backwards."[573] Moreover, political patronage as well as the ability to secure the alliance of local politicians such as mayors or city council members has provided a means of projecting higher-level, proxy-influence over the Italian Parliament, including with respect to lobbying against laws relating to money-laundering and/or draconian incarceration arrangements for apprehended bosses.[574]

The export or, to be more accurate, replication of such locally forged methods into new territories, including overseas, has followed a logic of gradual and considered expansion that combined harnessing the significant Calabrian diaspora overseas and sending out 'starter' elements to new dominions.[575] For example, a report by the Italian DIA highlights the extent to which its practices, behaviours and activities in Germany largely mirror those found in

[567] Cited in E. G. Parini, p. 56.
[568] Anna Sergi, *Mafia and politics as concurrent governance actors. Revisiting politics and crime in Southern Italy* in P.C van Duyne *et al* (eds), *The relativity of wrongdoing: Corruption, organised crime, fraud and money laundering in perspective*, Oisterwijk: Wolf Legal Publishers, May 2014, p.65
[569] E.G. Parini, p. 55.
[570] A. Sergi, p. 55. See also M. Daly, *The Mafia Built A Port. Now It's a Global Cocaine Hub,* 1 July 2022, https://www.vice.com/en/article/88qa3a/calabrian-mafia-ndrangheta-port-cocaine.
[571] EUROPOL *Italian Organized Crime Threat Assessment*, p. 7.
[572] *Ibid*.
[573] Camera Dei Deputati, Doc. XXIII No. 5 (2006), p. 62.
[574] E.G. Parini, p. 56.
[575] See for example DIA 2021, pp. 345-377.

Calabria,[576] with similar accounts describing the organisation's wider European footprint.[577] At the same time, the particular focus of the activities conducted within different geographical locations may differ depending on the specific purpose or value of those localities within the organisation's overall strategic calculus. Illustratively, activities on Latin American soil may gravitate primarily around the organisation's large-scale narco-trafficking operations in contrast to, say, activity in Switzerland, which is more akin to what wiretapped 'Ndrangheta members describe as the "perfect logistics base."[578] Critically, however, both of these territories fit within a larger inter-connected strategic system bringing together core functions such as the generation of (illicit) revenue trafficking, reinvestment of profit and power projection. In turn, the ability to exploit gaps and windows of opportunities within the international system in accordance with its strategic blueprint whilst retaining internal cohesion and security has proven to be an important feature of the organisation. This, as Rocco Sciarrone explains, has involved a delicate combination of structural closedness and the type of external openness required for the "reproduction of [its] social networks, as well as facilitating extensions and diversification in [its] field of activity."[579] Accordingly, this chapter will now turn to the organisational model and structural mechanics underpinning this approach.

6.3 Organisational structure

The 'Ndrangheta's *modus operandi* and pursuit of strategic interests relies on a complex, highly effective and easily replicable organisational structure. Whilst accounts and descriptions of the organisation's inner workings vary significantly between sources (both in terms of terminology and detail), careful examination of existing materials allows the researcher to build a reasonably accurate picture of its constituent parts.[580] Clans, or to be more precise, *'ndrine* (or *'ndrina* in the singular form, also sometimes referred to as *cosca*), lie at the heart of its operating model. Estimates generally place the number of these *'ndrine* at possibly 150 (up from about 50 in the early 2000s), with a combined membership of around 10,000 individuals.[581] These organisational nodes form the backbone of the organisation's cell-based, horizontal structure.[582] They typically consist of around fifty individuals usually belonging to the same extended family and enjoy a degree of supremacy over the territory – or *Locale* (*Locali* in the plural form) – in which they operate.[583] These micro-spheres of influence are typically controlled by one *'ndrina*, although more powerful *'ndrine* may exert jurisdiction over more than one *Locale* whilst conversely, larger *Locali* may host more than one *'ndrina*.[584] The *'ndrina's* ability to function as an easily exportable, self-sufficient and autonomous entity has been key to the 'Ndrangheta's external projection of power, whilst its family-centered character has promoted cohesion and the maintenance of secrecy.[585]

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[576] *Relazione annual sulle attivita svolte dal Procuratore Nazionale antimafia e dalla Direzione Nazionale antimafia*, Direzione Investigativa Antimafia (DIA), 2012. This pattern is also described in the DIA's most recent (avalaible) parliamentary report (2021).
[577] See for example F. Allum et al. (eds), *Italian Mafias Today: Territory, Business and Politics*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2019, p. 203.
[578] D. Gerny, *Today considered the most dangerous mafia group in Italy, the 'Ndrangheta is making inroads in Switzerland*, Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 9 May 2022.
[579] R. Sciarrone, 'Ndrangheta: A Reticualr Organization, in N. Serenate (ed.), p. 87.
[580] Given the variations and discrepancies within the reporting, this section deliberately focuses on structural organs and characteristics that can be corroborated via multiple sources.
[581] See for example M. Baumann, *Operation Eureka: The 'Ndrangheta is the most dangerous mafia*, NZZ (CH), May 2023, https://www.nzz.ch/international/operation-eureka-die-ndrangheta-ist-die-gefaehrlichste-mafia-ld.1737075?reduced=true&mktcval=Twitter&mktcid=smsh.
[582] B. Çayli, *Social networks of the Italian mafia; the strong and weak parts*, CEU Political Science Journal. Vol. 5, No. 3, 2010, p. 387.
[583] E.G. Parini, p. 53. See also EUROPOL Italian Organized Crime Threat Assessment, p. 3.
[584] *Ibid*.
[585]Camera Dei Deputati, Doc. XXIII (2006), p. 194.

Locali, meanwhile, serve a function that is very loosely akin to that of federal states, and these may in fact come together as even larger entities, known as *'mandamenti* (three of these exist in Calabria).[586] *Locali* are represented by *capo locale* – alternatively referred to as *capobastone* or more simply as *capos* – who typically sit at the head of the *'ndrine* operating in different *Locali*. The allocation of 'policy portfolios' may also be distributed between authoritative figures at the *Locale* level. For example one collaborator of justice describing roles within the *Locale* of Ventimiglia in northern Italy's region of Liguria explained how illicit trafficking and political engagement were managed by different *capos*.[587] *Locali* also usually include a *contabile* responsible for accountants and finances.[588] Traditionally, the 'mother' *Locale* of San Luca served as the supreme *Locale*, including with respect to recognising new *'ndrine* as well as the territorial integrity of new *Locali*.

From the early 1990s onwards, the growing size and influence of *Locali* and their respective *'ndrine* paved the way to an upper level, executive 'commission' or *Provincia* led by bosses referred to as *Crimine* (or *Capo Crimine*) and acting as a supreme council.[589] The commission built on the foundation of the exclusive *Santa*, which court documents suggest was a "semi-secret structure" introduced in the 1960s and comprising 'Ndrangheta members "authorized to join the freemasonry [and] establish contacts with senior public administration officials, physicians, engineers, and attorneys."[590] The collegial body is made up of the *capos* of the most important *Locali* (particularly those with jurisdiction over Reggio Calabria's strategic territories), and has the power to approve new '*ndrine*, shape the organisation's overall strategic direction and forge new alliances.[591] The body also appears to act as an overall stabilising force within the organisation, whilst holding a quasi-judicial function, including with respect to ruling on key edicts, disputes and the use of violence.[592] Indeed, the level of internal conflict and number of feuds within the 'Ndrangheta – particularly apparent within the context the of the so-called ''Ndrangheta wars' of 1974-1976 and 1985-1991 within which clans vied for power – appears to have decreased with the introduction of the body, thus also guarding against the risk of descent into an intra-mafia war.[593]

At the same time, the overall directive role of the upper body and supra-coordination structures remains a point of contention. On the one hand, judiciary investigations have revealed 'Ndrangheta attempts at 'institutionalising' an inter-organisational model by "creating a legitimate exercise of power, recognised by members of the groups" and "formalizing more precisely some leadership roles to be set up through election."[594] On the other, and perhaps as might be expected from such a diffused organisation, some commentators have expressed a degree of scepticism over the ability of higher command structures to exert firm control over

[586] *Discussioni Anti-Mafia*, Atti Palementari, Camera Deputati, Senato Repubblica, Doc. XVII (Legislatura), 21 February 2018, p. 57.
[587] '*Ndrangheta: per Cretarola è Palamara il boss della "locale" / La ricostruzione del delitto Delfino*, Riviera24.it, April 2014.
[588] R. Sciarrone, p. 89.
[589] These include the Centre, Iconic Coast and the Gioia Tauro Plain. See E. G. Parini, p. 53.
[590] *Discussioni Anti-Mafia*, Doc. XVII (2018), p. 58.
[591] See for example *What is the 'Ndrangheta?*, Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), 1 July 2001, www.occrp.org/en/ndrangheta/what-is-the-ndrangheta; and L. Paoli (2003), pp. 51-58.
[592] C. Cordova, *Ecco come funziona il tribunale della 'ndrangheta*, Il Dispaccio, 06 July 2017; and E. Ciconte, p. 46. The organisation's most senior figures allegedly conduct meetings every September in the San Luca during the Festival of the Holy Mary of Polsi. See C. Anesi and L. Bagnoli, *Bitter Beauty: A Pilgrimage to the Birthplace of the 'Ndrangheta*, Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, 21 September 2018.
[593] M. Catino, *Mafia Organizations: The Visible Hand of Criminal Enterprise*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019, p.211. See also G. Sorgonà, *Società e 'Ndrangheta, Il Caso Reggio Ca*labria, Laboratoire Italien, No.22 (22), Febuary 2019.
[594] R. Sciarrone, p. 94.

the organisation beyond "decisions at the collective level."[595] Whilst some important decisions were undoubtedly taken by the 'Ndrangheta's higher leadership over the years, including in relation to the assassination of prominent public figures, day to day operational decisions largely rest with the *'ndrine*.[596] To be sure, these entities appear to retain a significant degree of autonomy and influence, with the wider organisation thus amounting to more of a cooperative model rather than a "unified decision-making system."[597] Critically, clans, and the families that run them, constitute largely self-contained structural entities to the extent that they may encompass all of the key functions necessary for a criminal network to operate and flourish.

Clear tasks and divisions of labour are thus discernible within the clans, including with respect to identifying new business partnerships, coordinating trafficking activities and book-keeping (i.e., overseeing accounts and money laundering operations). Meanwhile, *'ndrina* autonomy also extends to accessing public resources and influencing the management of municipal affairs (or similar level governance structures, depending on the territory).[598] An illustrative example of this dynamic is that of the Crea family, whose Rizziconi-based clan has demonstrated particular guile in acquiring control of public construction contracts and road haulage operations as well as developing close ties with other historical families such as the 'Alvaro' of Sinopoli and the 'Mammoliti' of Castellace.[599] Moreover, in his study of the 'Ndrangheta's internal social relations, Francesco Calderoni explains how kinship ties have increased trust amongst associates and therefore reduced the need for direct control and/or interventions by leaders as well as promoted an "opportunity-orientated modus operandi."[600] The high level of cohesion within the *'ndrina* structure has also increased their resilience to disruption by law enforcement activity to the extent that apprehended individuals are (usually) rapidly replaced by trusted associates allowing the clans to resume criminal activities at previous levels.[601]

The wider operating model of the 'Ndrangheta also relies on a cadre of individuals with more of an emissary role, including with respect to forging strategic relationships and assisting its entry into new markets. Indeed, the organisation draws on network of brokers who play an important role by acting, as Morselli explains, "neither [as] patrons nor clients" but instead, as representatives for multiple clans.[602] Such individuals therefore act a vanguard in securing partnerships between, for example, drug producers in Latin America and wholesale distribution networks in Europe, demonstrating what social network analysis refers to as a high degree of 'betweenness.'[603] In this respect, brokers essentially act as commissioned, quasi-diplomatic trade envoys or, indeed, as 'ambassadors' within new markets.[604] Some of these individuals appear to have risen to positions of significant influence precisely because of their connections and deal-making qualities. Examples include the case of Roberto Pannunzi, who forged early links with the Medellin Cartel, and Rocco Morabito, once the second most-wanted

[595] *Ibid,* p. 95.
[596] R. Sciarrone, p. 95. See also A. Sergi*, Meet the 'Ndrangheta: It's time to bust some myths about the Calabrian Mafia*, The Local (IT), 9 July 2019, https://www.thelocal.it/20190709/meet-the-ndrangheta-its-time-to-bust-some-myths-about-the-calabrian-mafia/
[597] *Ibid.*
[598] For an illustrative example of infiltration into Lombardy see also Caterina Gozzoli et al., *'Ndrangheta in Lombardy: Culture and Organizational Structure***,** World Futures: The Journal o**f** New Paradigm Research, December 2014, pp. 404-405.
[599] Camera Dei Deputati, Doc. XXIII (2006), p. 56
[600] F. Calderoni, p. 21
[601] *Ibid.*
[602] C. Morselli, *Inside Criminal Networks*, Studies of Organized Crime, New York: Springer, 2010, p. 17.
[603] F. Calderoni, p. 19.
[604] M. Johnson, *Latin American drug cartels in lucrative tie-up with the 'Ndrangheta*, Financial Times, 28 April 2021, https://www.ft.com/content/3feb59c5-b8e1-4d90-8f22-eb8040883fb8.

fugitive in Italy and described by the Italian anti-mafia commission as the "king of cocaine brokers."[605] To be sure, Morabito's many achievements included forging business opportunities for 'Ndrangheta clans in Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay, whilst also acting as an envoy for powerful Calabrian families.[606] Similarly – and despite the high levels of internal cohesion within the *'ndrine* – the organisation has leaned on *external* professionals in a trend that mirrors the wider behaviour of modern organised crime groups (as will be explained later in this chapter).

Identity, membership and recruitment

Affiliation with and recruitment into the organisation is guided by charters, pledges, codes and rituals. At the heart of these rituals lies the organisation's ideological narrative, which combines symbols, meaning and historical accounts in constructing a particular culture and identity. The narrative traces the organisation's genesis to Osso, Mastrosso and Carcagnosso, three mythical Spanish knights of the early 15th Century who fled their native land after defending their honour in a family blood feud.[607] This tale provides many hooks for the organisation's code, including an emphasis on secrecy, honour and the central importance of the family.[608] Interwoven within the narrative are religious symbols and an emphasis on the protection of Catholic saints, whilst initiation rites, particularly the all-important 'baptism' into the 'Ndrangheta, resemble church ceremonies. New members need to adhere to specific requirements before being permitted to undergo initiation rites, including possessing ties to mafia families.[609]

Progression within the organisation starts at the junior rank of 'honoured youth,' before promotion to more senior and active roles within the organisation as 'honoured men'.[610] Italian Carabinieri surveillance footage of a swearing-in ceremony to the upper-level *Santa* also highlights the extent to which the emphasis on adherence to codes and oaths transcends across the different levels of the organisation,[611] with senior members sworn-in to the rank of *Santista* amongst religious effigies.[612] Both the ideological narrative and accompanying rites and rituals contribute to the acquisition of status, identity and meaning, in what Parini describes as 'ornaments' that play a key role in attracting youths living in rural Calabria – a region with an employment rate of over twenty percent.[613] Moreover, DIA reporting explains the ways in which rituals and affiliations "constitute the link that 'Ndrangheta factions from all around the world maintain with the parent company in Reggio [Calabria].[614]

Whilst women are prevented from formally joining the organisation, they nevertheless play an important role in the private sphere in both maintaining the 'Ndrangheta's cohesion and

[605] '*Ndrangheta Mafia Kingpin Return to Italy to Serve a 30-Year Sentence*, Reuters, 6 July 2022.
[606] D. den Held, *Cocaine Brokers: The Flexible Backbone of the 'Ndrangheta Trafficking Empire*, InSight Crime, November 2022, https://insightcrime.org/investigations/cocaine-brokers-flexible-backbone-ndrangheta-trafficking-empire/.
[607] J. Dickie, *Mob Mentality: Mafia History*, The Independent, 8 June 2011.
[608] E. Ciconte, pp. 36-38.
[609] This could be broadly described as a variation on the concept of 'nationality'.
[610] R. Sciarrone, p. 89.
[611] *Italian Police Catch Mafia Initiation Rites On Camera Leading To Arrests*, The Guardian, 18 November 2014.
[612] C. Anesi, *Italy's Most Powerful Mafia Mingles with Devoted Christians at the Sanctuary of Polsi in Calabria*, Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), 20 September 2022, https://www.occrp.org/en/ndrangheta/italys-most-powerful-mafia-mingles-with-devoted-christians-at-the-sanctuary-of-polsi-in-calabria.
[613] E.G. Parini, p. 54.
[614] DIA 2021, p. 18.

reproducing its cultural code as mothers, wives, sisters and daughters.[615] They also conduct specific activities, such as participating in criminal negotiations, overseeing finances, and bringing messages to prisoners, whilst acting as "guarantors of honorary men's reputations."[616] The transmission of mafia principles and values through women may also extend to encouraging male relatives to carry out their duties, including with respect to the carrying out acts of violence within the context of vendettas or as a means of regaining honour. Finally, arranged marriages offer a vehicle for cementing alliances between *'ndrina* families, thus offering a vehicle not only for the survival but also for the expansion of clans and their respective spheres of influence.[617] At the same time, some sources suggest that women have increasingly accepted to act as collaborators of justice, possibly reflecting a greater degree of independence and assertiveness in the modern context as well as a partial rejection of patriarchal systems and "miniature fiefdom[s] in which women are little more than vassals of family honour."[618] Women, it has also been argued, have also at times been motivated by a desire to interrupt what they might consider as the fundamental risks associated with close family members becoming deeply involved in criminal activities.[619] To be sure, this gendered dimension deserves further examination by those seeking to understand potential sources of change within the organisation.

The existing literature on the 'Ndrangheta paints a complex picture when describing levels of support for the organisation outside of its immediate structure. Theoretically at least, the extortionary methods employed within local communities ought to have resulted in a high degree of rejection and apprehension as well as contributed to anti-mafia sentiment within localities within which its presence could be felt most acutely. At the same time, and as previously noted, the Calabrian mafia's powerbase is concentrated in a region in which the state has traditionally had limited reach and visibility. The 'Ndrangheta has exploited this relative marginalisation both as part of its narrative and through its activities as a means of gaining legitimacy in the eyes of the local population. Illustratively, and as was also the case with other mafia branches, the organisation stepped-in to provide welfare loans to struggling businesses during and immediately after the Covid-19 pandemic.[620] Clearly, such support also provided the additional benefit of securing financial leverage over small enterprises, increasing dependency and thus further tightening its economic hold in key municipalities. Indeed, commentators point to the extent to which the Italian Mafia syndicates have turned a profit from emergencies ranging from earthquakes to cholera outbreaks throughout their 150-year history, both by placing themselves in the position of service providers and by "sourcing agricultural workers, fixing construction contracts [and] siphoning funds meant for city sanitation."[621] A more nuanced analysis would therefore suggest that the local populace, rather than actively supporting the mafia, may have come to see it as an embedded and immoveable part of the social tapestry.

[615] O. Ingrascì, 'Ndrangheta Women in Contemporary Italy: Between Change and Continuity in N. Serenate (ed.), 2014, p. 70.
[616] *Ibid*. p. 63.
[617] E. Ciconte, p. 36.
[618] A. Perry, *The Women Who Took On the Mafia*, The New Yorker, January 2018 Issue, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/01/22/the-women-who-took-on-the-mafia.
[619] See for example C. Longrigg, *The Good Mothers Review – Women Challenging the Mafia*, The Guardian, 13 February 2018.
[620] E. Amante, *Italian Mob Seeks to Profit from Coronavirus Crisis, Prosecutors Say*, Reuters, 16 April 2020, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-italy-mobsters-idUSKCN21Y1AF
[621] H. Roberts and J. Barigazzi, *Mafia plots Post-Coronavirus Pounce*, Politico, 7 April 2022.

6.4 Levers of power

As highlighted earlier in this chapter, the policy calculus of the 'Ndrangheta is calibrated around the pursuit of power and securing its strategic and territorial interests. However, and as in the case of state actors, the organisation has a range of levers of influence at its disposal, which it can apply in concert – albeit to varying degrees – in different contexts.

Violence

Unsurprisingly, the 'Ndrangheta retains the means through which to apply violence in pursuit of its strategic objectives. From the 1970s, it turned to kidnapping and abductions, with ransom payments providing an important source of revenue.[622] As the organisation moved to lower-profile criminal activities, violence – which had previously been used also to settle internal disputes – became more of a targeted tool employed for the purposes of unlocking strategic opportunities, sending messages and warning-off potential competitors and/or adversaries. Illustrative of this pattern was the October 2005 killing of Franceso Fortugno, the President of the Regional Council of Calabria, which appeared to be sanctioned at a senior level of the organisation in an apparent attempt to intimidate Calabrian politicians and sway the outcome of regional elections.[623] However, as already alluded to earlier in this chapter, the 'Ndrangheta has learned from the Cosa Nostra and others about the risks involved in applying violence too liberally, with parliamentary documents suggesting that whilst remaining an essential resource, "it is used less and only in extreme cases, when no other form of pressure, intimidation or delegitimization will do."[624] Exceptions to this rule, including the so-called 'Duisburg Massacre' in Germany where six Calabrians were killed outside a pizzeria in a violent feud between clans, proved harmful to the organisation, shining a light on their operations and level of infiltration within the country.[625] Such internal disputes in overseas territories also demonstrate a wider trend in which local conflicts that have their roots in territories of origin may spill over into new 'colonies.'[626]

Imports, exports, transport and logistics

Just as the revenue of states is predicated on their economic and trading activity, so too has the 'Ndrangheta carved out its own sources of profit through the provision of (illicit) goods of and services. The organisation's documented forays into smuggling activities date at least to the post-war years when *'ndrine* began to import cigarettes from foreign countries and reselling these at lower prices than those sold legally through state-controlled tobacco shops.[627] The transnational connections as well as systems and processes established for the purposes of tobacco smuggling provided the basis for subsequent diversification, particularly into narcotics trafficking. With heroin importation being largely monopolised by the Cosa Nostra, the 'Ndrangheta turned increasingly to the cocaine trade from the 1980s onwards; a decision that soon started to generate considerable dividends.[628] Critically, the organisation's devolved structure proved to be the ideal recipe for expansion within the criminal underworld as well as for securing influence over different links of the transnational drugs supply chain. Some estimates place the Calabrian mafia's overall control over wholesale cocaine imports to Europe as high as eighty percent, although it is likely that the relative market share of Albanian

[622] M. Catino, p. 96.
[623] E. Ciconte, pp. 45-46. This also demostrates the role of the upper level of the organisation in dictating the terms under which violence can be utilised.
[624] *Discussioni Anti-Mafia*, Doc. XVII (2018), p. 59.
[625] *EUROPOL Italian Organized Crime Threat Assessment*, p. 11.
[626] F. N. Moro and S. Sberma, *Transferring Violence? Mafia Killings in Non-traditional Areas: Evidence from Italy*, Journal of Conflict Resolution, Vol.62, No. 7, August 2018, pp. 1579-1601.
[627] E. Ciconte, p. 38.
[628] EUROPOL Italian Organized Crime Threat Assessment (2013), p. 11.

organised crime groups (who enjoy a strategic alliance with the 'Ndrangheta) has increased in recent years.[629] Still, the organisation differs from Albanian syndicates in that it appears to focus primarily on the bulk purchase and distribution of cocaine, rather than street level retail, which is outsourced to other organisations (including Albanian and Nigerian groups); an approach that may also decrease the mafia's exposure to routine arrests of street-level dealers.[630]

Footholds in (new) territories and strategic partnerships provide a key mechanism of securing access to and influence over the transport and logistics hubs and solutions which, together, form the backbone of 'Ndrangheta's cocaine trafficking operations. As already explained, this activity starts with striking deals with cocaine producers located in Latin America, with large consignments of cocaine subsequently dispatched to Europe (its biggest market), primarily via transatlantic container shipping.[631] In doing so, the organisation is able to draw on its intelligence-gathering capabilities, including with respect to identifying suitable and safe container-shipping companies and routes. Although preferred transhipment nodes have evolved over time, including in response to law enforcement seizures, these likely include the Brazilian port of Santos (at least partly controlled by the PCC), the Ecuadorian port of Guayaquil and the Colombian of port of Cartagena, all of which constitute favoured departure points.[632] Infiltration within strategic hubs, including maritime ports typically involves the recruitment of highly efficient 'rip off' teams responsible for retrieving cocaine consignments in European ports, including the 'super ports' of Antwerp, Rotterdam, Hamburg and (of course) Gioia Tauro, assisted by complicit insiders such as dock workers and customs officials.[633] DIA reporting also highlights the extent to which smaller ports such as Bremen (Germany) have been increasingly targeted by the organisation following recent seizures at larger ports.[634] Moreover, the organisation also demonstrated the ability to infiltrate logistics and packaging companies more locally, such as in the illustrative case of TNT's (the multinational logistics group) Global Express branch in Lombardy, which was exploited for the purpose of drug trafficking.[635]

Building on a familiar theme, the 'Ndrangheta's ability to leverage '*ndrina* influence and access has proven to be a critical logistical enabler, ensuring "increasingly solid reliability" and providing a basis "to develop criminal associations [...] with the most qualified organisations."[636] Moreover, its exploitation of established trade routes and connections to other actors demonstrates the attributes of a highly market-orientated criminal group in-so-far as it leverages existing (or 'external') logistics solutions rather than seeking to acquire its own transportation capabilities. Similarly, its ability to discretely 'piggyback' on legitimate commerce is such that many of the companies whose containers the organisation uses to smuggle cocaine (banana consignments always appear a favourite), are unaware of how their

[629] OCCRP, 2001. This analysis also likely fails to capture the extent to which the organisation does not monopolise the market per se but act in partnership with a range of other actors.
[630] R. Donadio (The Atlantic/October 2020).
[631] Admittedly, the organisation also uses transport methods such as sailing boats in order to move cocaine within Europe, such as to Balearic Island of Ibiza. See '*Action against Italian mafia in Spain: 32 arrests*', European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation (EUROJUST), 20 September 2022.
[632] See for example Y. Nieves and M. Betancur, PCC-'Ndrangheta, *The International Criminal Alliance Flooding Europe with Cocaine*, InSight Crime, 8 August 2019, https://insightcrime.org/news/analysis/pcc-ndrangheta-criminal-alliance-flooding-europe-cocaine/.
[633] Consignments are likely marked with stamps or other signs so that they can be distinguished and/or routed to the correct customer. See S. Bhave, *Guayaquil Remains Ecuador's Busy Cocaine Gateway to Europe*, InSight Crime, 14 October 2019, https://insightcrime.org/news/brief/guayaquil-ecuador-cocaine-gateway-europe/.
[634] DIA 2021, p. 360.
[635] '*TNT, Commissariate Per Mafia Le Filiali Milanesi Del Corriere'*, la Repubblica, 18 April 2011.
[636] DIA 2021, p. 16.

logistical platforms are being exploited.[637] This approach distinguishes its behaviour from vertically integrated organisations such as the Medellin and Sinaloa Cartels, both of whom opted to establish their own fleets of aircraft for the purposes of cocaine trafficking.[638] It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that the organisation has in recent years applied the expertise and methods forged within the cocaine business to other criminal activities, including ecstasy and hashish trafficking, weapons and ammunition smuggling, illegal waste dumping, racketeering, fraud, illegal gambling and even reselling Serie A football tickets at inflated prices.[639]

Finance and money laundering

The financial and money laundering activities of the 'Ndrangheta are complex, highly structured, and multifaceted, spanning across different economic sectors and international borders. As we have seen, these go further than simply concealing the origin of criminal profit and instead constitute a fundamental instrument of power in their own right: a means of ensuring sustainable growth, social embeddedness and territorial control. To this end, the organisation harnesses layers of complex corporate and offshore structures, business façades, shell and front companies, capitalising on an increasing globally connected financial system. It also draws on a sizeable legion of small, cash-rich businesses – typically shops, restaurants, bars, ice cream parlours, hotels, gyms and garages alongside tourism, catering, food delivery, funeral, transport and import-export services – spread across multiple jurisdictions. Trendy clubs on the French Riviera and in the Iberian Peninsula, supermarkets in the Baltics, pizzerias dotted across Germany and Belgium, cafés in Rome's historical Via dei Condotti and even London boutique restaurants known for their risotto all fit within this pattern.[640]

Some of these businesses also likely constitute effective fronts for trafficking operations. Examples here include cocaine-delivering pizzerias in New York; the 'Ndrangheta-controlled Fondi fruit and vegetable market in Rome (considered to act as a logistical 'revolving door' for trafficking); and an Aalsmeer (Netherlands)-based flower company used to dispatch cocaine concealed amongst tulip and hyacinth bunches.[641] As already noted, the 'Ndrangheta has also mastered the art of acquiring larger commercial holdings and companies, particularly within the construction, real estate, agricultural, health, utilities (electricity, gas and water) and waste-

[637] C. Anesi and G, Rubino, *Inside the Mafia-Run Cocaine Network Shattered By European Police*, InSight Crime, 17 December 2018, https://insightcrime.org/news/analysis/cocaine-network-european-police/. A similar Modus Operandi was reported by EURPOL - See *'Cocaine Lords Targeted in Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands'*, EUROPOL, 21 April 2022, https://www.europol.europa.eu/media-press/newsroom/news/cocaine-lords-targeted-in-belgium-germany-and-netherlands.

[638] Pablo Escobar evolved from transporting small consignments on a Piper PA-18 Super Cub single engine monoplane to acquiring much larger aircraft, which included the very vintage but durable Douglas DC-3 as well as DC-4 and DC-5 variants, 13 Boeing 727s bought from a bankrupt airline and a luxurious Learjet, which he used for the purpose of cash smuggling. Between 2006 and 2015, Mexican authorities seized close to 600 aircraft flown by Joaquin 'El Chapo' Guzman's Sinaloa cartel, dwarfing the country's largest airline in terms of aircraft numbers. See for example P. Catiang, *King of the sea and the sky: tracing Pablo Escobar's drug routes by the vehicles and tactics he used*, ABC-CBN, 18 November 2018, https://news.abs-cbn.com/ancx/culture/spotlight/11/18/18/the-king-of-sea-and-sky, and C. Woody, *'El Chapo' Guzman had more airplanes than the biggest airline in Mexico,* Business Insider, May 2016.

[639] '*Italy Tribunal: Juve Supporters Infiltrated by Mafia'*, Chicago Tribune, 29 September 2017.

[640] See for example A. Perry, *Rise of the 'Ndrangheta: How the Feared Calabrian Mafia has Reached the UK*, The Times, 02 December 2018; *'A Bruxelles un intero quartiere comprato dalla 'ndrangheta'*, la Repubblica, 5 March 2004; and E.G. Parini, p. 55.

[641] See for example U. Savona Ernesto and M. Riccardi (Eds.), p. 192; and C. Anesi *et al*., *Maffia Nog Steeds Actief Op Bloemenveiling*, AD Nieuws, 27 March 2017, https://www.ad.nl/binnenland/maffia-nog-steeds-actief-op-bloemenveiling~a98fe749/.

scrapping sectors, whilst tapping into public contracts and even bulk-purchasing Italian Treasury Bonds and Treasury Credit Certificates.[642] More widely, the German security services claimed as early as 2008 that *'ndrine* in the country were able to influence the Frankfurt stock exchange through the bulk injection of capital.[643]

Investigations and court documents once again highlight the ways in which the organisation capitalises on readily accessible systems and specialised services, including by enlisting the help of white-collar professional 'enablers' such as tax advisors, lawyers, notaries and engineers who "put themselves at the service of the clans in a wide variety of contexts."[644] Parliamentary reports also acknowledge that "judges and law enforcement officials have not remained immune either."[645] This pattern of utilising external professional service providers further reinforces the trend in which the organisation aptly harnesses (external and systemic) market forces, services and expertise in pursuit of its strategic ends. In a further variation of this theme, the organisation is also able to call in on favours, including from those to whom it has given loans, as well as draw on a cadre of non-affiliated businesspeople that are turned into so-called *prestanome* (or 'front men') for purposes such as developing relationships with banks.[646] Similarly, and true to the organisation's code of loyalty, family relatives who are not directly involved in criminal activities and trusted affiliates without convictions may also be put to task as the official owners of mafia-controlled assets, including in new territories.[647]

Meanwhile, the growing emphasis on economic investments and money laundering activities outside of Italy fits within the 'Ndrangheta's strategy of taking advantage of more permissive legislative and regulatory frameworks. Thus, a joint Italian-Hungarian law enforcement operation conducted in January 2023 highlighted the ways in which the organisation had set up money laundering mechanisms, including a web of bank accounts, in Budapest.[648] Even in Italy, a country equipped with draconian anti-mafia laws, the sheer number of suspicious transaction reports (STRs) submitted by the private sector under existing compliance requirements significantly complicates the task of identifying 'Ndrangheta-related financial activity within the wider sea of reporting: over 110,000 such reports are submitted every year.[649] This is despite the fact that, although difficult to estimate, an often-cited study by the Demoskopika research institute placed the 'Ndrangheta revenue at around 3.5% of Italy's gross domestic product (GDP), with around 24 billion Euros earned from drug trafficking alone.[650]

(Counter) Intelligence and operational security

As might be expected from any organisation involved in criminal activities, the 'Ndrangheta has also developed strong operational and internal security protocols to prevent infiltration and disruption. As previously highlighted, the combination of a clan-based composition and code of honour that emphasises loyalty, secrecy and silence constitutes the bedrock of its internal

[642] L. Mirenda *et al*., *The boss on board: Mafia infiltrations, firm performance, and local economic growth*, Centre for Economic Policy Research, 26 October 2016, https://cepr.org/voxeu/columns/boss-board-mafia-infiltrations-firm-performance-and-local-economic-growth.
[643] E.G. Parini, p. 60.
[644] Camera Dei Deputati, Doc. XXIII (2006), p. 62.
[645] Ibid, pp. 61-62.
[646] Italy's 'Ndrangheta hit by major international bust, The Local (IT), 5 December 2018, https://www.thelocal.it/20181205/italy-ndrangheta-mafia-suspects-bust/.
[647] E. Ciconte, p. 44; See also A. Ulrich, *Inside the World of the 'Ndrangheta*, Der Spiegel, 4 January 2012.
[648] *New Action against 'Ndrangheta in Italy and Hungary*, Eurojust press release, January 2023, https://www.eurojust.europa.eu/news/new-action-against-ndrangheta-italy-and-hungary
[649] DIA 2021, p. 12.
[650] *'Ndrangheta mafia 'made more last year than McDonald's and Deutsche Bank'*, The Guardian, 26 March 2014.

defence and resilience strategy.[651] This helps to explain the small number of state witnesses and collaborators of justice (so-called *pentiti*) willing to defect from – or testify against – the organisation, in comparison to other branches of the Italian Mafia. The significance of family ties within the organisation acts as a further bulwark against informers and infiltration by the state security services, not least because "a Calabrian Mafioso who decides to collaborate would have to denounce his father, children, siblings, uncles, grandchildren, cousins, and in-laws."[652] Moreover, judicial documents highlight the fact that no head of a major 'Ndrangheta locale has accepted to turn against the organisation."[653] The 'Ndrangheta has also adopted practical measures to protect its criminal operations, including the use of specially encrypted communications.[654]

6.5 Bringing it together

Describing the evolution of the 'Ndrangheta in recent years, an Italian attorney involved in counter-mafia operations concluded that the organisation "shoots less but corrupts more, and always has relations with the world of business and politics."[655] To a large extent, this aptly articulates both the strategic logic and *modus operandi* of what has become one of the most efficient clandestine organisations in the world. Often staying below the regulatory and law enforcement radar, the 'Ndrangheta has, through a combination of infiltration, alliances with some of the most powerful organised groups in the world, co-option, judicious financial investments and a highly exportable and self-sufficient operating structure, succeeded in both retaining influence in its 'domestic' Calabrian fiefdom and securing access to new territories overseas. True, any claim that the organisation's 'colonising' approach is carefully choreographed by what equates to a central 'authority' in San Luca would miss the extent to which the 'Ndrangheta acts as a fluid, distributed network within which clans, the '*ndrine*, have significant autonomy. At the same time, and perhaps somewhat paradoxically, the 'Ndrangheta demonstrates a high level of cohesion, allowing it to add up to more than the sum of its parts and act as a strategic, power-projecting entity. This is in no small way a product of its internal ethos, narrative and recruitment processes, all of which contribute to its identity, whilst emphasising a sense of belonging to a wider family and brotherhood. What is striking, moreover, is the extent to which the organisation, through a combination of trial and error, strategic guile and (inevitably) having to adapt to law enforcement disruptions, has if anything become more efficient. This is evidenced not only through its transnational business partnerships, but also through its exploitation of commercial systems, logistics processes, financial vehicles and professional networks in what amounts to a blurring of lines between the traditional criminal 'underworld' and the 'legitimate' as well as formal 'upper-world'.

The above dynamics are directly relevant to the thesis' central investigation, whilst at the same time reintroducing some of the challenges to the state-centric paradigm outlined earlier in the dissertation. Firstly, the case study supports the argument that even criminal organisations are fundamentally *political* in nature with significant agency with respect to formulating policy and strategy decisions aimed at challenging state authority, increasing territorial expansion and forging partnerships (hypothesis 1). Critically, the organisation's *glocal* (global-local) characteristics reveal how clandestine non-state actors emerging from highly localised contexts and environments can spread tentacles further afield, including in different cultural

[651] L. Paoli, *Crime Italian Style*, p. 5.
[652] E. Ciconte, p. 36.
[653] Hearing of the Assistant Public Prosecutor at the Court of Reggio Calabria, Verbatim report No. 27, Sitting of 14 April 2014.
[654] This was the case when specially converted encrypted phones using the EncroChat and Sky ECC communication tool were cracked. See '*Cocaine: Increasingly Attractive for a Wider Range of Criminal Networks'*, European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), 6 May 2022.
[655] *Emessa dal GIP del Tribunale di Catanzaro,* cited in DIA (2021), p. 14.

and political environments, as part of a networked power system. Secondly, the case study reveals what has proven to be a highly adaptive and resilient organisation (hypothesis 2) aided by its devolved, horizontal structure. This same morphology has meant that the core functions and activities of individual parts of the organisation could be easily replaced or reactivated by others or new clans in the event of disruption.[656] Thirdly, the case study shows how the 'Ndrangheta has effectively combined multiple approaches and instruments of power, including by establishing complex trading, logistics and financial systems (hypothesis 3). Clearly, the argument could be advanced that the organisation's devolved and decentralised character means that it cannot (even conceptually) be compared to a miniature state actor. Whilst there may be some grounds for this challenge, the counter-argument would be that states themselves need not be highly centralised or monolithic, such as in the case of highly federalised political systems and/or countries where local government entities enjoy a high-level of political autonomy (to include overseas territories). Still, addressing this thesis' overarching research question of whether different clandestine non-actors display similar or, indeed, recurring approaches to projecting power requires the investigation of additional groups as a basis for comparison – the precise focus of the two subsequent chapters.

[656] Conceptually this might be compared to the military concept of 'reinforcement' within the traditional war-fighting doctrines of states.

CHAPTER 7 – al Qaeda 'core'

Al Qaeda rose to the forefront of the Western national security agenda in the wake of the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States World Trade Centre and Pentagon, heralding the era of the 'global war of terror'. The organisation catalysed military interventions and lengthy counter-insurgency campaigns, sparked the biggest manhunt in history and triggered the (re)allocation of billions of dollars of government spending, alongside the development of counter-terrorism and counter violent extremism doctrine. On the opposite side of the playing field, 'AQ' (as the organisation tended to be referred to in policy and intelligence circles) inspired countless violent non-state actor groups wishing to join what was rapidly becoming a highly popular ideological franchise. These ranged from so-called 'home grown' cells carrying out attacks on the streets of London and Madrid to armed insurgencies and jihadist groups spanning from the Sahel to Iraq. During this time, intelligence analysts, military planners and academics alike burned the candle, attempting to fully understand and capture the inner-workings of what appeared to be one of the most effective transnational terrorist groups in modern history. In turn, the sheer ambition of 'the terrorist organisation which took on a superpower' makes it a highly relevant case study, including with respect to this thesis' research question, the latter of which is centred around clandestine non-state challenges to state authority.

To that effect, this chapter offers a revised and consolidated take on the organisation. Its design and approach to data collection, treatment and synthesis is guided both by the analytical framework described earlier in this thesis and by the case study research methodology detailed in chapter 1. As such, it placed a heavy emphasis on identifying credible primary data sources, including by drawing on troves of declassified documents. The latter, most of which were seized by US Navy Seals in the course of their raid on Osama bin Laden's compound in Abbottabad (Pakistan), offer a unique window into al Qaeda's inner sanctum. Indeed, these provide insights relating to the group's strategic vision as formulated by its senior leadership, financial activities and internal management challenges as well as shedding light on communication between members operating across the wider transnational terrorist franchise. These sources, which are threaded across the analysis, are augmented by further primary sources, such as court indictments, intelligence reporting and digital resources such as group statements, *fatwas*, and social media content. Secondary sources used to contextualise the analysis include academic journals, investigative journalism accounts and evidence uncovered in the production of the United States' '9/11' Commission Report. Its findings, which are (once again) organised around the analytical framework provide a basis not only for further testing the thesis' hypotheses, including with respect to the ways and means available to modern clandestine non-state actors seeking to project power and influence at scale. As such, and while the overall focus of the analysis is on the original and central al Qaeda kernel (interchangeably referred to in the literature as 'al Qaeda core' and 'al Qaeda centre'), the chapter also touches on offshoots and partners situated within the group's wider network of influence.

7.1 Overview: historical evolution of al Qaeda

Those wishing to adopt a historical perspective might argue that the origins of al Qaeda could be traced back at least to the mid-eighteenth-century teachings of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, the 'founding father' of modern Wahabbi Islam, whose radical theology would later inspire Osama bin Laden. In his Book of Unity (written in the 1740s), al-Wahhab rejected modernity, whilst advocating for both the destruction of infidels and the pursuit of violent jihad. Al-Wahhab's influence grew under the protection of Muhammad Ibn-Saud from the Royal House of Saud and the two applied the tenants of the Wahabbi dogma and jihad within the

context of an ongoing feud with Ottoman Turks.[657] Commentators preferring a slightly shorter time horizon, may instead point to the legacy of the 1916 Sykes Picot agreement, which effectively curbed ambitions for a unified Arab state – an enduring grievance reflected in the narratives of subsequent groups and movements across the Arab world.[658] Others still may highlight the continued rise and morphing character of the movement for Arab Identity (al-Nahda, or 'cultural awakening') following World War II,[659] as well as the significance of the 1948 proclamation of Israel and the 'Palestinian question' relating to the rights and claims of displaced Palestinian located in Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and the Gulf States.[660] This paved the way for the creation of, *inter alia,* Fatah in 1959, whose mission was to unite disparate Palestinian communities under the common aim of liberating Palestine through armed activity, as well its radical offshoot, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), which shaped the character of modern terrorism in the Middle East and beyond.[661]

However, it was the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, ostensibly to avert the collapse of the country's deeply unpopular communist government, that created the *specific* conditions conducive to the birth of al Qaeda. By the mid-1980s, the Soviet Union was embattled in a stalemate against a loose coalition of armed resistance groups fighting under the banner of Mujahideen ('those engaged in Jihad'). The Mujahideen were deeply committed fighters who benefited from external support, including that of the United States, the latter of whom notoriously provided insurgents with Stinger anti-aircraft missiles channelled through Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence agency (ISI).[662] In a dynamic loosely resembling that of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), the Mujahideen's call to arms drew in foreign fighters from across the world. Such individuals were often recruited, placed and funded through specialist organisations, one of which was the Peshawar-based 'Office of Services' (Maktab al-Khidmat, or 'MAK') led by the Palestinian-born Abdullah Azzam.

Azzam's own story was singular. He had earlier in life moved to Jordan to join the Palestinian resistance against Israel but found little in common with the largely secular PLO. Instead, he became drawn to the teachings of Muslim Brotherhood leader Sayyid Qutb, becoming a strong advocate of 'internationalising' the Islamist movement.[663] The MAK provided Azam with an

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[657] L. Erickson, *God's Terrorists: The Wahhabi Cult and the Hidden Roots of Modern Jihad by Allen Charles (Reviewed Work)*, Journal of Strategic Security, Vol. 3, No. 3, Fall 2010, pp. 78-80.

[658] The 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement saw Britain and France agree, with Russian approval, to carve up the Arab territories by way of the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement, whilst the 1917 Balfour Agreement sought to support the idea of a 'national home' for the Jewish people. The legacy of these agreements continues to transpire through the grievance narratives of various of movements in the region.

[659] P. E. Pormann, T*he Arab 'Cultural Awakening (Nahḍa)', 1870-1950, and the Classical Tradition*, International Journal of Classical Tradition, Vol. 13, No. 1, Summer 2006, pp. 3-20.

[660] See C. Shindler, *A History of Modern Israel (Second Edition)*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2008, pp.44-55. See also J.A. Massad, *The Persistence of the Palestinian Question: Essays on Zionism and the Palestinians*, Routledge, London, 2006, pp. 114-135.

[661] The PLO was noteworthy both with respect to its devolved structure – its headquarters were located in Damascus before relocating to Amman and subsequently to Beirut and Tunis – and as a regional ideological network connecting separate minority pockets located across state boundaries. See for example *"The PLO Offices in Tunis and Amman: Possible Roles, Links and Conduct in Fatah Operations"*, Central Intelligence Agency, Released in April 2014, pp. 2-4. See also K. Katzman, *The PLO and Its Factions*, Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, The Library of Congress, June 2002; and See also K. Katzman, *The PLO and Its Factions*, Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, The Library of Congress, June 2002.

[662] Some of the commanders who benefited from this support – a case in point being Jalaluddin Haqqani, founder of the Haqqani network – went on to serve in the Taliban government after the movement came to power in 1996 and would become a thorn in the side of NATO forces two decades later. See for example M. Rosenberg, *Founder of Haqqani Network Is Long Dead, Aide Says*, New York Time, July 2015.

[663] Sayed Qutb (1906-1966) was and remains a galvanising figure as one of the most influential advocates of modern, fundamentalist interpretations of jihad. Abdullah Azam articulated his own

opportunity to implement this ambition, drawing on far-ranging donations from wealthy Gulf-based individuals, Islamic charities and the Saudi Intelligence Services.[664] He later remarked that the "small band of Arabs" recruited through the MAK, "whose number did not exceed a few hundred individuals, changed the tide of battle, from an Islamic battle of one country, to an Islamic World jihad movement, in which all races participated and all colours, languages and cultures met."[665] The MAK, in turn, issued a range of products aimed at promoting recruitment, fund-raising and awareness, including the monthly *Jihad Magazine*[666] and the *Mawsu'at al-jihad al-Afghani* (or Encyclopaedia of the Afghan jihad) – a multi-volume manual describing a combination of bomb-making and guerrilla tactics, complete with accompanying illustrations and diagrams. Ironically, significant sections of the manual were drawn from American materials such as CIA paramilitary training guides – or 'black books' – produced in the 1950s as well as other partisan and guerilla materials.[667] When Azzam was himself killed in a mysterious explosion in 1989, the organisation came under the *de facto* control of his wealthy Saudi protégé and fellow MAK alumni: Osama bin Laden.

Even though bin Laden, the seventeenth of fifty-seven children of a Saudi construction magnate family, had joined Azam at the young age of twenty three, his own ideology had gradually begun to differ from that of his mentor.[668] This split was in some respect a reflection of the growing influence of the small group of Egyptian radicals, including Dr Ayman Al Zawahiri, who surrounded bin Laden.[669] Whilst Azzam had advocated the reclaiming of previously Muslim lands such as Palestine, the Egyptians took a more radical stance, calling for the overthrow of governments deemed 'apostate' across the Muslim world.[670] This bolder aim, along with the overlapping aspiration of removing American troops from Saudi Arabia, became the central mantra of bin Laden's new organisation, now renamed al Qaeda (or 'the base').[671] When Soviet troops withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989, bin Laden and his Arab cohorts refocused their operational structures and support networks, including the continued patronage of Jalaluddin Haqqani – the hardline founder of the Haqqani network who had himself been a beneficiary of US support against the Soviets – on a more global mission.[672]

In the following years, the group worked on exporting al Qaeda's ideology to new territories such as Somalia and Yemen, whilst also forging connections with groups in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Algeria, Mali and Indonesia. The organisation, moreover, funded volunteer militias to bolster Bosnian Muslim units fighting the Serbs in the Bosnian War from around 1992, some of whom also benefited from Iranian, Turkish and US clandestine arms shipments

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thoughts in a series of works, including two books: *Join the Caravan* and *The Defence of Muslim Lands.* See A. McGregor, *Jihad and the Rifle Alone: 'Abdullah' Azzam and the Islamist Revolution*, Journal of Conflict Studies, Vol. 23, No. 2, February 2006, https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/JCS/article/view/219/377.

[664] *Ibid*.

[665] Sheikh 'Abdullah 'Azzam, "*Martyrs: The building blocks of nations*," Extracts from the lectures of Sheikh 'Abdullah 'Azzam titled "Will of the Shaheed" and "A Message from the Shaheed Sheikh to the Scholars," Internet source: http://www.azzam.com (29 January 2003) In *Ibid*.

[666] The magazine started out as an amateur production but became increasingly professional and polished over time. See P. L. Bergen, *The Osama Bin Laden I Know: An Oral History of al Qaeda's Leader*, Free Press, New York, p. 32.

[667] A. McGregor, *Jihad and the Rifle Alone: 'Abdullah' Azzam and the Islamist Revolution*, Journal of Conflict Studies, Volume 23, Number 2, Feb. 2006.

[668] *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks on the United States* (Authorised Edition), W.W. Norton & Company Inc., New York, p. 55.

[669] Al Zawahiri's own organisation, the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, would later be formally merged with al Qaeda.

[670] P. L. Bergen, p. 74; pp. 92-94.

[671] The term had already been used by Azzam in a 1988 copy of *Jihad Magazine* which, interestingly (and like Che Guevara, referred to the concept of a 'vanguard'. *Ibid,* p. 74.

[672]A. Gopal, M.K. Mahsud *et al.*, *The Haqqanis and al-Qaeda*, Foreign Policy, June 2010, http://foreignpolicy.com/2010/06/30/the-haqqanis-and-al-qaeda/.

delivered through independent arms dealers and a pipeline of covert 'black flights.'[673] Bin Laden himself spent time personally building organisational roots in Sudan before its government came under increasing pressure to expel the al Qaeda leader. Although distrustful of bin Laden, the Taliban, who had come to power in 1996, subsequently provided al Qaeda with a safe haven for operational planning and training in return for financial contributions. Al Qaeda now continued to build its (already widespread) funding platform into a complex network of NGOs and private donors. It also developed an effective 'force multiplier' model that retained only a small core focused on providing equipment, training and recruitment advice to affiliated groups. However, the organisation's lethality and threat to Western interests soon become apparent. After releasing an official *fatwa* declaring war on the United States in 1996, it carried out attacks against US embassies in Nairobi and Dar es-Salaam in 1998 and bombed the USS Cole naval warship in Aden in 2000. Planning for the 2001 attacks on New York and Washington D.C began in earnest around 1998 under the delegated supervision of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed who had himself fought in Bosnia.[674] In the era of globalised mass media, the eyes of the world were now literally set on the group, which rapidly became the symbol of the US-led War on Terror.

7.2 Policy choices and strategic direction

Strategic aims, interests and spheres of influence

The task of deciphering al Qaeda's overarching policy goals is made easier by the plethora of statements, broadcasts, interviews and *fatwas* conducted or issued by the organisation over the last two decades. Indeed, these were largely intended at socialising and 'selling' the organisation's vision to potential sympathisers as well as increasing support for the organisation's cause. Additional nuance, moreover, can be obtained through the analysis of detailed internal correspondence within the higher echelons of the organisation. At a very high level, and as previously highlighted, al Qaeda's primary aim consists of the overthrow of apostate, Western-backed regimes across the Muslim world, particularly those "subsidiary to America."[675] This would in turn pave the way to the creation of a unified Ummah (or supra-national Islamic community) "of a billion and a half, which [would be] alone among the Nations and possesses laws from the Creator of the world," therefore constituting "the largest Nation in [the history of] mankind."[676] The idea of a pan-Islamic State, essentially a modern and consolidated take on the traditional Caliphate, is fundamentally political in nature, hinged upon the imposition of Sharia law and associated governance systems under the ultimate leadership of an Islamic council, the latter of whom would promote "knowledge and the right understanding of Islam."[677] Such a state would also constitute "the fastest way to resolve the [existing] issues of the Muslim community."[678] To a large extent therefore, the organisation's overarching policy position appears to have been nothing less than presenting itself as the saviour of Islam.[679] .

Whilst al Qaeda's desired sphere of influence can perhaps be loosely described as flowing outward from Mecca, Saudi Arabia and the wider Arabian Peninsula across the Islamic world,

[673] The Bosnian jihadi volunteers were largely comprised of veterans from the Mujahideen campaign against the Soviet Union. Moreover, al Qaeda contributions were funded in part through the Advisory and Reformation Committee based in London. See M. Curtis, *A Covert War in Bosnia*, edited extract from *Secret Affairs: Britain's Collusion with Radical Islam*, October 2016.
[674] B. O. Riedel, *The Search for Al Qaeda: Its Leadership, Ideology, and Future,* Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C, 2008, p. 7.
[675] *Note on leadership*, Bin Laden's Bookshelf, Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI), Declassified January 19, 2017, p. 4.
[676] *General instructions*, ODNI, Declassified January 19, 2017, pp. 4-5.
[677] *Note on leadership*, ODNI, p. 4.
[678] *Letter from Abu Yahya*, Declassified January 19, 2017, ODNI, p. 2.
[679] This sentiment also appears to also be held privately at the highest levels of the organisation.

the organisation evolved towards an 'outside in' policy calculation that involved growing the Ummah by connecting different sub-regions or epicentres that were ripe for change and/or political disruption. A letter containing general instructions most likely written by bin Laden thus explains that "every continent has a state that is the key to its revolution."[680] For example, Yemen, a country in which al Qaeda established an early presence, was often cited as one such epicentre with the potential to catalyse a wider revolution (we will return to this sequencing theme in a subsequent section).[681] Other localities, meanwhile, would serve different strategic purposes, such as staging posts for force projection or, as in the case of the mountainous regions of Pakistan, as safe havens for the purposes of training and planning offensive operations.[682] Similarly, more marginal theatres in "far flung regions of the Islamic world, such as Chechnya, Afghanistan, Kashmir and Bosnia" could still play an important role in laying the "groundwork and [providing] the vanguard for major battles."[683]

In a related trend, the organisation's strategic interests and, therefore, operational focus have long included securing control over resource-rich localities, production centres, infrastructure and waterways. This included an emphasis on "the rivers in our lands", including "the Nile River, Jordan River, al-Asi, al-Litani, Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, not to mention the large valleys in the Arabian Peninsula."[684] Al Qaeda's leadership also highlighted that "the amount of oil produced in the Gulf (of Algeria) is astonishing," whilst pointing to the fact that the Nile River not only ran throughout the year but that its "High Dam capacity is seven billion square meters, and the length of its lake is 400 Kilometres."[685] In turn, control over such resources and areas of significant economic importance would be achieved through a quasi-federal system of governance allowing for devolved control over large swathes of strategically important territory.

External relations and alliances

Al Qaeda's leadership understood that securing influence and access to critical territories required strategic alliances and partnerships, particularly in periphery territories situated on the edges of the organisation's perceived sphere of influence. The group's approaches to building such relations often involved emissaries and representatives dispatched to identify, shape and/or broker strategic relations in new territories. Such an approach typically consisted of either direct negotiations with prospective partners or the establishment of 'forward deployed' cells in countries like Yemen and Sudan that effectively amounted to a variation on the theme of a (highly clandestine) embassy network acting as the group's eyes and ears in different geographic contexts. Indeed, true to their roots and to the experience of the MAK, the organisation's core very much viewed its role as that of an enabler capable of augmenting and harnessing local grass-roots movements through strategic advice and catalytic contributions such as finance, specialist training and advice. The organisation thus provided support in response to specific requests by *inter alia* Sahelian jihadists and considered aiding the Nigerian Boko Haram before the latter opted to declare its allegiance to al Qaeda's offshoot and eventual competitor, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS).[686]

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[680] *General instructions*, ODNI, pp. 4-5.
[681] Opportunities in Yemen, according to al Qaeda's leadership, were also amplified by "a shortage of water and the poverty rate of 40 percent." *General instructions*, ODNI, p. 8.
[682] See *9/11 Commission Report: The Official Report of the 9/11 Commission and Related Publications*, Washington, 2004, p.171; and Z. Laub, *The Taliban in Afghanistan*, Council on Foreign Relations, July 2014.
[683] *Letter from al-Zawahiri to al-Zarqawi*, published by Institutional Scholarship, July 9, 2005, p. 2, https://scholarship.tricolib.brynmawr.edu/handle/10066/4798.
[684] General instructions, ODNI, p. 5.
[685] Ibid.
[686] Boko Haram subsequently changed its name to the Islamic State West African (ISWA). See for example J. Schanzer, *Al-Qaeda's Armies, Middle East Affiliate Groups & Next Generation of Terror*, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2005. pp. 99-105.

The task of seeking out and securing alliances was also aided by a sprawling alumni network of battle-hardened ideologues harking back to the days of the Afghan resistance. One such example consisted of the Algerian Groupe Islamique Armé (GIA), an Islamist terrorist group that emerged in the early 1990s following the splintering of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) and which comprised a considerable number of ex-Mujahideen fighters amongst its ranks.[687] The GIA, which amongst other sensationalist acts hijacked a French airliner in 1994, enjoyed privileged access to al Qaeda's core leadership by way of a standing representative.[688] Hardliner jihadists within the alumni network also formed the backbone of subsequent (splinter) groups in the country, including the Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat (GSPC). Indeed, the GSPC formalised its ties with al Qaeda in 2007 when it changed its name to al Qaeda in the Land of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) following sustained diplomatic contact and discussions between jihadist envoys.[689] Targeted discussions and dialogue with prospective affiliates constituted not only a means of building new partnerships but also "the most ideal way to solve problems."[690] Envoys and representatives were given clear instructions with respect to negotiating positions as well as 'lines to take' – an approach (once again) not overly dissimilar to how embassies receive diplomatic instructions from their foreign ministries in capital cities. Examples of such instructions included persevering with negotiations in Somalia "until an agreement that will satisfy Al Shabaab is reached,"[691] mediating between disagreeing parties in Iraq and recognising tribal structures in Yemen.[692] At the same time, the organisation realised that dialogue should be accompanied by tangible incentives, such as financial or technical assistance, and that diplomacy should therefore be applied in tandem with these to achieve maximum effect.

At times, this assistance extended to technical advice on development projects. Illustratively, it sought to sell to Somali affiliates the idea of creating irrigation systems that could "provide water for 40,000 acres," while highlighting the value of "strategic plants, such as dates and fruit trees" that could "provide for people very quickly."[693] The organisation's development advice was also fundamentally transnational, urging partners to consider "mutated and [...] more economically rewarding" palm and olive trees imported from countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia.[694] Al Qaeda considered employment opportunities as central to agricultural projects, advising partners that crops should be "manually harvested so as to keep jobs."[695] The organisation also became an early advocate of measures aimed at curbing climate change, which, it argued, was "causing drought in some areas and floods in others."[696] Moreover, it emphasised the value of establishing flooding early warning systems in Pakistan, whilst warning Somali associates of the risks of "cutting down trees on a large scale [including] for the purpose of creating charcoal, without replacing them."[697]

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[687] A. Thurston, *Jihadists of North Africa and the Sahel: Local Politics and Rebel Groups*, Cambridge University Press, October 2020, pp. 27-62.
[688] *United States of America v. Usama Bin Laden et al*, United States District Court Case S(7) 98 Cr. 1023, Southern District of New York, 6 February, 2001, p. 297.
[689] See for example J.P. Filiu, *The Local and Global Jihad of Al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghrib*, Middle East Journal, Vol. 63, No. 2, spring, 2009, pp. 213–26.
[690] *Letter from Abu Yahya*, ODNI, p. 3.
[691] *Letter dated 07 August 2010*, ODNI, p. 15.
[692] *Letter dated 18 July 2010*, ODNI, Declassified May 20, 2015, p. 1.
[693] *Letter dated 07 August 2010*, ODNI, p. 4.
[694] *Ibid*.
[695] *Ibid*.
[696] *Ibid*, p. 6.
[697] Furthermore, such development of advice was clearly calibrated at helping to achieve al Qaeda's longer-term objectives as indeed, "once the suffering of millions of Muslims would vanish, [then] people would start protecting the existence of the Islamic emirate." *Ibid*, pp. 5, 6,15.

Still, relations and negotiations with jihadist groups within the franchise did not always go smoothly. In some case, and perhaps unavoidably, al Qaeda core also found itself competing with some of its affiliates. This dynamic became most apparent within the context of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), forged by ex-al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) fighters and former members of the Baathist regime, whose vision and strategic principles increasingly began to differ from those of the original al Qaeda leadership. Previously, al Qaeda's central leadership had disagreed with AQI's rogue Jordanian leader, Ahmad Fadhil Nazzal al-Khalaylah, a once-petty criminal who went by the 'nom de guerre' of Abu Mussab al-Zarqawi.[698] The most fundamental point of divergence between the two camps consisted of al-Zarqawi's instance that triggering a sectarian war within Iraq, including through the indiscriminate targeting of civilians, constituted the best approach to securing strategic gains in the country, a philosophy considered by al Qaeda core to be both a strategic distraction and "chauvinistic".[699] Similarly, al Qaeda centre could do little to steer the conversations and strategic brainstorming sessions held in US prisons in Iraq during which jihadis, including future ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, discussed the shape of the new Islamic State.[700] Competition would also arise subsequently between ISIS and other offshoots of al Qaeda such as Jabhat al-Nusra (JN), the official al Qaeda (AQ) affiliate operating in Syria.[701]

Strategic logic and sequencing

The group's policy choices and partnerships hint at some of the more granular characteristics of its strategic logic, including with respect to where and how to focus its efforts. As already alluded to, the organisation's calculus had long gravitated around the notion of "preparing an environment in Saudi Arabia [and beyond] for a revolution" through a wider chain-reaction of revolts and revolutions mobilising and connecting the peoples of separate enclaves of support.[702] Documents seized in Osama bin Laden's Abbottabad compound provide further detail on what essentially amounts to a 'three stages' approach. The aim in the first stage consisted of defeating the 'greatest' foreign enemy (specifically the US) through sustained attrition in theatres such as Afghanistan,[703] "[keeping him] in open fronts"[704] and "directly exhausting him until he breaks and becomes too weak to interfere in the affairs of the Islamic nation."[705] Al Qaeda's second stage then consisted of "exhausting the local enemy," specifically regimes in the region considered to be puppets of America.[706] Finally, the third stage would involve building the new Islamic State.[707] At the same time, the organisation

[698] Al Zarqawi was one of the more infamous recruits from Azzam's office in the days of the MAK.
[699] Such scepticism was expressed by Al Zawahiri in a letter written to Al Zarqawi in July of 2005. See *Letter from al-Zawahiri to al-Zarqawi*, July 9, 2005, p. 4.
[700] These camps, moreover, offered an opportunity for the jihadists to develop relations with secularist albeit disillusioned former senior members of Saddam Hussein's government with real-world technocratic expertise, organisational skills and statecraft. As one commentator noted, the Jihadis' "time in prison deepened their extremism and gave them opportunities to broaden their following. [...] the prisons became virtual terrorist universities: The hardened radicals were the professors; the other detainees were the students." T. McCoy, *How the Islamic State evolved in an American prison*, The Washington Post, November 4, 2014. See also M. McBride, *Unforced Errors: ISIS, The Baath Party, and the Reconciliation of the Religious and the Secular*, Politics, Religion & Ideology, Vol. 20, May 2020, pp. 1-22.
[701] Jabhat al-Nusra's approach remained closer to that of al Qaeda core, including with respect to a greater emphasis on avoiding the alienation of the Syrian civilian population.
[702] *General Instructions*, ODNI, p. 3.
[703] *Three Stages Letter*, ODNI, Declassified on January 19, 2017, p. 1.
[704] *Letter to Abu Bashir*, ODNI, Declassified March 1, 2016, pp. 2-6.
[705] *Letter to the Islamic nation*, ODNI, Declassified January 19, 2017, p. 4.
[706] *Letter to Abu Bashir*, ODNI, p. 6.
[707] Students of guerrilla and irregular warfare might perhaps point to a loose resemblance to previous generations of revolutionaries and, more specifically, to Mao's Tse-tung's three phases of guerrilla warfare (strategic-defensive, stalemate and strategic-offensive). Whilst Mao's concept of the strategic defensive differed slightly from al Qaeda's more ambitious first stage of expelling external forces, the

placed a heavy emphasis on both strategic patience and concentration of effort, seeking to avoid quagmires and/or being pinned down by the adversary. "Avoid minor fronts, right and left, and avoid engaging in skirmish" its leadership thus advised its followers.[708] Moreover, whilst gains in Libya were considered important in terms of unlocking the group's objectives, it nevertheless assessed that activities in the country should only involve "specific types of operations" and that the country should not be "an open front for constant and continuing operations whether they are against intelligence centres, the police, the military, or anything of that nature."[709] The group's leadership similarly stressed "the importance of timing in establishing the Islamic State," as well as being aware that "planning for the establishment of the State begins with exhausting the main influential power" (namely America), "exhausting and depleting them until they become so weak that they can't overthrow any State that we establish."[710]

Bin Laden and his fellow senior leaders also warned against attempting "to control [territory] just because we have the military power to do so, [when] we still do not have the power to sustain the people in their livelihood."[711] Seizing and controlling resources and production centres was thus a necessary condition for the longer-term political control of territory. Indeed, the ability to *provide* for populations living in controlled territory became a central consideration for the group, who realised that this was an important means of maintaining their consent. This strategic logic further helps to explain the group's focus on covert approaches and the gradual infiltration of new 'political markets', either through the proactive growth of local cells, or by encouraging more spontaneous lone wolf operations. Illustratively, its leadership concluded that the "battle [...] does not require large numbers," instead placing the emphasis on small groups of operatives in strategic locations to further the organisation's cause.[712] This thinking bears similarities with the thinking of revolutionaries such as Ernesto Che Guevara (outlined in Chapter 3), not least given, once again, its emphasis on the catalytic role of vanguards as a means of shaping the decisive conditions for change.

7.3 Organisational structure

Al Qaeda increasingly evolved into a fluid, networked and horizontal organisation with limited direct control from the central leadership over the day-to-day activities of various entities, franchises and cells. This dynamic, which Jessica Stern once described as 'protean', [713] was partly a deliberate decision by the original founders to adopt a devolved operating model and partly a result of attrition within the al Qaeda core following two decades of counter-terrorism operations. Nevertheless, one cannot ignore the role of the group's central leadership in shaping the overarching narrative, brand, and operating ethos of the movement, particularly in its early years. Indeed, in the decade that followed al Qaeda's birth, its leadership structures were more cohesive and visible. Thus, 'Sheikh' Usama bin Laden held the position of Emir, sitting at the helm of the group, with the final say over its decisions. He and his number two,

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two strategies share increased resemblance in subsequent steps. Indeed, Mao's stalemate phase (guerrilla warfare) reflects al Qaeda's focus on enemy exhaustion, whilst both Mao and al Qaeda espoused the merits of transitioning towards more conventional tactics and, ultimately, gaining control of territory in the third phase.

[708] *Letter to Shaykh Mahmud*, ODNI, Declassified January 19, 2017, p. 3.

[709] *Letter from Abu Yahya*, ODNI, p. 4.

[710] *Letter Addressed to Atiyah*, ODNI, Declassified May 20, 2015, p. 4.

[711] *Three Stages Letter*, ODNI, Declassified January 19, 2017, p. 2.

[712] Al Qaeda *'Letter about Logistics'*, Bin Laden's Bookshelf, declassified on January 19, 2017, https://www.dni.gov/index.php/features/bin-laden-s-bookshelf?start=1.
Following the Soviet withdrawal of Afghanistan, al Qaeda's worked on exporting its ideology as far as Somalia and Yemen whilst forging connections with groups in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Algeria, Mali and Indonesia as well as Bosnian Muslim units fighting the Serbs in the Bosnian War.

[713] J. Stern, *The Protean Enemy*, Foreign Affairs, Council on Foreign Relations, Vol. 82, No. 4, July-August 2003, pp. 27-40.

Ayman al-Zawahiri, adopted a hands-on approach to leadership, making regular appearance at jihadi training camps where they gave lessons on "religion […] and the importance of martyrdom and obedience" as well as "the enemy's developed technology, Massud's role in the Crusader's war, booties of the Northern Alliance, [and] the Al Sa'ud family conflicts."[714] Even in the days leading up to the September 11, 2001 attacks, bin Laden was described by trainees as having "a big entourage around him."[715]

Analysis of the organisation's activities throughout the 1990s also points to other prominent figures who were active in coordinating activities, preparing operations and overseeing training. Illustrative of these is Saif al-Abdel, a veteran of the Mujahideen years, who had once served as a Colonel in the Egyptian Special Forces, and who advised on terrorist training programmes in Sudan, Kenya, Somalia and Yemen before fleeing to Iran in the wake of the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001.[716] Similarly, Abdullah Ahmed Abdullah, who was best known by the 'nom de guerre' of Abu Muhammad al-Masri and who for years was considered as the organisation's 'number three' before being killed by (likely) Israeli agents in Iran in 2020, played a central role in organising the August 1998 US embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania, using skills he had once acquired in a Hezbollah explosives training programme.[717] Further adding to this pattern was the much publicised trial of Omar Abdel-Rahman, 'the blind Sheikh', which highlighted the latter's direct involvement in the 1993 World Trade Centre bombing in New York. Thus, members of the al Qaeda's core organisation were very clearly involved not only in providing strategic direction but also in coordinating tactical-level operations before being increasingly forced to work through affiliates.

For years, the closely knit circle of Mujahideen veterans that formed the kernel of al Qaeda met and discussed the movement's strategic direction and activities via its Shura command council, the 'Majlis Al Shura.'[718] This decision-making and command body was originally chaired by bin Laden as the organisation's Emir and brought together senior members with responsibility for individual committees, each of whom covered a particular area of responsibility. Key committees included those for political affairs, religion, military activities, administration and finance, security and the media. Some of these committees also had sub-functions and structures such as the training and special operations wings that sat below the military committee.[719] However, sub-unit commanders were not typically invited to the higher Shura council, with decrees and orders instead communicated to them following deliberations by the senior leadership group.[720] The Shura body, according to internal correspondence, allowed for different views to be aired and for "everyone from the consultative body [to] offer his opinion and present evidentiary proof."[721] It was also rather flexible and, if required, mobile, with the ability to be convened in different localities.
Once again however, the ability for even al Qaeda's core leaders to convene council meetings and exemplify this kind of cohesive approach to leadership became increasingly difficult when

[714] *Letter dated 09 August 2010*, ODNI, Declassified May 20, 2015, p. 3.
[715] *Ibid*.
[716] Al-Abdel would later be apprehended by the Iranians but released as part of a prisoner exchange in March 2015. See for example S. M. Gohel, *Deciphering Ayman Al-Zawahiri and Al-Qaeda's Strategic and Ideological Imperatives*, Perspectives on Terrorism, Vol. 11, Issue 1, February 2017, p. 60.
[717] See A. Goldman *et al*, *Al Qaeda's No.2, accused in U.S. Embassy Attacks, was killed in Iran*, New York Times, November 13, 2020, and B. Roggio, *Rare photo surfaces of al Qaeda leaders inside Iran*, Long War Journal, September 2, 2022.
[718] *Alleged al Qaeda associated charges with conspiracy to kill Americans and other terrorism offenses*, Unites States Department of Justice, January 17, 2018, https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/alleged-al-qaeda-associate-charged-conspiring-kill-americans-and-other-terrorism-offenses.
[719] See R. Gunaratna, p. 1055.
[720] *Ibid*, p. 1056.
[721] *Letter of guidance on leadership*, ODNI, p. 4.

pushed into hiding. By the time bin Laden was killed, his deputy Ayman Al-Zawahiri had little choice but to accept a more limited, symbolic and distanced approach to leading the movement (a trend which is likely to continue following his own death in July 2022). Nevertheless, it remains useful to briefly examine some of the additional governance and coordination structures that the organisation *aspired* to introduce within its new Islamic State, had its campaign led to more tangible gains. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the roles and personality traits of bin Laden, al-Zawahiri and other senior associates served as the blueprint for the highest level of governance within new territories. Thus, the Emir should be a man of "superior faith" who, ultimately, would be "the one who decides" and with the ability to "remain constant" and "advance the [strategic] situation."[722] He was also expected to "adopt a correct, clear path in making such decisions" and to "fully consult on [matters], consider changing views, and dig into the depth of research."[723] Added to this list of qualities was the ability to "stay clear from favouring those who he feels comfortable with and rebuffing those who disagree with him" and "establish a totally transparent environment" before "pressing on with his endeavours and proceed with his decisions."[724]

It was envisaged that the new Islamic State would adopt a decentralised structure bringing together the various Emirates – essentially devolved states – that were to be erected in reclaimed territories.[725] These entities would require the creation of "councils of trustees" led by *Walis (provincial leaders)*, which would already be formed "before the revolution erupts, and [...] which [would] become part of the country's Administration throughout the transitional stage."[726] Further localised governance structures and systems would then be established, including "popular committees in neighbourhoods, in coordination with the Imams of the mosques and notables in every neighbourhood."[727] Additional judicial structures, chief amongst which would be an Islamic Law Committee (presumably with its own more devolved structures), were also proposed, alongside the creation of panels of Muslim scholars with responsibilities for jurisprudence.[728] Senior judges, in turn, would "provide rulings on all areas of life, except for trade issues" (the latter of which would require a specially-trained judge with technical expertise).[729] In a variation on the notion of policy think tanks, consideration was also given to creating a dedicated "centre for research and studies" supporting the central leadership group, which would help to identify key developments in international affairs and implications for the movement's response.[730]

Out of all of al Qaeda's franchises and offshoots, it was ISIS who came closest to implementing the type of governance systems envisaged by the organisation's original core, including in Raqqa, Fallujah and Mosul, and who, in so doing, demonstrated their practical application and viability. Indeed, ISIS's structures were conceptually similar to those proposed by al Qaeda: not only did the organisation have an Emir at its head in the form of Abu Bakr al Baghdadi; it also opted for a devolved (effectively federal) model comprising of *wilayat* ('provinces' or 'states'), each with their own governor as well as local, and at-time-cumbersome, bureaucracy and technocrats.[731] In a similar vein to al Qaeda's concept of a constellation of Emirates, ISIS's

[722] *Letter about revolutions*, ODNI, Declassified May 20, 2015, p. 1.
[723] *Ibid*, See also *Letter to Abu-Musa b Abd-al-Wadud*, ODNI, Declassified January 19, 2017, p. 7.
[724] *Ibid*, ODNI, p. 1.
[725] See for example *Letter from Abu Yahya*, ODNI, pp. 1-4.
[726] General Instructions, ODNI, p. 7.
[727] *Ibid*, p. 6.
[728] *Letter of guidance on leadership*, ODNI, p. 2.
[729] *Letter dated 07 August 2010*, Declassified May 20, 2015, p. 1.
[730] *Letter about revolutions*, ODNI, p. 1.
[731] One of the advantages of this governance model was that it could also be applied to geographically dislocated *wilayat* as far away as Libya, Algeria and Afghanistan.
See J. Stern and J.M Berger, p. 51. See also K. Bauer (ed.), *Beyond Syria and Iraq: Examining Islamic State Provinces*, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Washington DC, 2016, pp. 15-40.

governance model could also be applied in geographically dislocated *wilayat* as far away as Libya, Algeria and Afghanistan.[732] Moreover, the organisation developed a relatively complex system of administrative departments, or councils, responsible for activities such as religious outreach (*Da'wa*), military affairs and public information as well as courts and Sharia 'law' enforcement arms such as the infamous *Hisba* religious police.[733] Still, other members of the al Qaeda franchise opted for their own variations on the structural blueprints and ready-made 'general policy' guidance available to new branches,[734] as was the case with al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) which, in 2006, adopted a localised structure organised around *katiba* (brigades) and *sariya* (companies) that enabled it to better infiltrate local communities in northern Mali, Niger, and southern Algeria.[735] Meanwhile, *Jama'a Nusrat al Islam wa al Muslimeen* (JNIM), which subsequently evolved out of AQIM, adopted a strategy that involved delivering basic public services and even building schools in northern Mali.[736]

Overall, al Qaeda core's deliberate policy to opt for a franchise-based model carried both strategic benefits and drawbacks. On the one hand, it offered a relatively simple mechanism to harness the combined strength of local armed groups, starter-cells and lone wolves in different localities around the world, placing these under the overall umbrella of the movement. The efforts of affiliated groups could be further supported by opening offices – effectively quasi-embassies – in key territories and/or by dispatching centrally selected advisers, envoys and representatives to augment the efforts of start-up organisations.[737] At the same time however, such a devolved approach also complicated the ability of the original leaders to directly shape the direction and structural characteristics of the different franchises, the latter of whom did not always heed to the instruction of ensuring an "abundance of consultation" with the organisation's centre.[738] Indeed, whilst establishing a network of offices and envoys was seen as a means of building a bridge to the centre, such efforts were often mired in logistical and administrative constraints associated with finding appropriate representatives and dispatching these to various affiliates.[739]

Identity, membership and recruitment

Patterns relating to recruitment into, and support for, al Qaeda over the years were fundamentally intertwined with the organisation's ideological narrative and its resonance within different target communities. Its narrative drew on the themes of historical and current injustices, oppression and social marginalisation as the basis for both explaining and justifying

[732] See J. Stern and J.M Berger, p. 51. See also K. Bauer (ed.), *Beyond Syria and Iraq: Examining Islamic State Provinces*, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Washington DC, 2016, pp. 15-40.
[733] See for example C. C. Caris and S. Reynolds, *ISIS Governance in Syria*, Institute for the Study of War, Washington DC, 2014, pp.15-17. Critical elements of al Qaeda's governance models could also be recognised in Somalia, where Al Shabaab-controlled regions were administered by local governors under the authority of the organisation's executive *shura* (governing council) and where justice was provided through district level courts overseen by a cadre of judges (*Qaali*). See for example S. J. Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Islamist Group, 2005-2012*, Hurst & Company, London, 2013, pp. 83-90.
[734] *Gist of Conversation - October 2011*, ODNI, Declassified May 20, 2015, p. 3.
[735] K. Zimmerman, *Salafi-Jihadi Ecosystem in the Sahel*, American Enterprise Institute, April 2020, p.2
[736] *Ibid,* pp. 2-5.
[737] This approach involved "distributing brothers" in key localities, including in "Tunis, and Syria and other locations [..], waiting until the revolution succeeds [..] and the country falls into chaos." Letter dated 5 April 2011.
[738] *Letter on Shura*, ODNI, Declassified January 19, 2017, pp. 1-8.
[739] Illustratively, the leadership complained in one letter that "we have been trying to open another office in Turkey, but we unable to find the suitable brother for this office, and we had sent a brother to Iraq, but he has not arrived yet." *Report on External Operations,* ODNI, Declassified May 20, 2015, p. 3.

the organisation's response. As already alluded to, this highlighted the "afflictions that had impacted the Muslim countries: [...] first, the existence of American-Western hegemony over us" and "second, the presence of rulers that have abandoned the provisions of Shari'ah and have become part of this American hegemony." [740] Another recurrent as well as related theme within this narrative was that of a "Zionist-Crusader alliance" which had subjugated "a million and a half of our Muslim brothers in Gaza, [and] claimed the lives of women and children",[741] which was characterised by "infidelity, tyranny, injustice [...], abuse, arrogance, and disdain for the people, [reaching] an unbearable state."[742] Building on this diagnosis of the problem, al Qaeda's narrative then progressed to the response and ways to "remedy the problem of injustice", including by legitimising the adoption of violent jihad to overthrow apostate regimes and free the Ummah.[743] Its manifesto, moreover, drew heavily on selected theological works and scriptures, including prominent thinkers within the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood such as Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966) and Sa'id Hawwa (1935-1989). [744]

It is clear that al Qaeda core's leadership closely followed geostrategic developments in an attempt to both sound-out new constituencies of support and ensure that the organisation's narrative was relevant to current events. Thus, a letter to bin Laden written by a close associate around the time of the Arab Spring spoke about opportunities following "the fall of the tyrants in Tunis and Egypt" and the extent to which the group was "watching the situation in Libya, Yemen and Syria."[745] The organisation's leadership was similarly adept at getting ahead of events, including by issuing statements and communications that were aimed not only at mobilising potential followers but also at guiding and educating them.[746] These included "instructions and reminders to the youth and entire nation", which contained messages aimed at "urging people to continue on the path of jihad", whilst taking the opportunity to remind them of "the deceitfulness of the Americans [and] that the Jewish state is about to end and so on."[747] The organisation also took a broad view to building political support bases and consent – one that required "a much deeper vision than just talking about the issue of pledging allegiance."[748] Thus, envoys and representatives sent to recruit and mobilise followers in various countries were reminded that whilst pledges of allegiances should be encouraged where possible, those who did not make such pledges should not be shunned because "with the passage of time they will appreciate your tolerance, which will make them close to you and they will join you."[749] This pragmatism and ability to tailor the organisation's messages to different audiences as well as inject these at key times of political change and unrest arguably constituted one of the most important mechanisms for maintaining relevance over the course of four decades.

Unsurprisingly thus, the group's narrative also contributed to the recruitment and indoctrination of rank and file members and formed a key component of training camp curricula.[750] For this reason, senior trainers within the organisation places a particular emphasis on establishing basic and intermediate Sharia training courses "that all Mujahideen [must] pass through, so that they may gain a general understanding of [...] Jihad" before progressing to military

[740] *Letter to the Islamic nation*, ODNI, p.4
[741] *General Instructions*, ODNI, p. 5.
[742] *General Instructions*, ODNI, p. 8.
[743] *Note on leadership*, ODNI, p. 2.
[744] See for example *Studies into Violent Radicalisation; Lot 2: The beliefs ideologies and narratives,* The Change Institute for the European Commission, February 2008, p.34. See also Letter on Shura, ODNI, p.4.
[745] *Letter dated 5 April 2011,* ODNI, Declassified May 20, 2015, p. 3.
[746] *General Instructions*, ODNI, p. 1.
[747] *Letter dated 5 April 2011,* ODNI, p.3
[748] *Letter from Abu Yahya*, ODNI, p. 4.
[749] Letter Addressed to Atiyah.pdf (dni.gov) p. 2.
[750] This pattern can be recognised in the accounts of fighters who had graduated from such training. See for example Letter dated 09 August 2010, ODNI, p.3.

training.[751] Admittedly however, the selection, recruitment and training of active operatives working directly for al Qaeda core followed a much more formal and scrutinised process, particularly when this involved individuals appointed to positions of responsibility. Indeed, the organisation did not just take anyone onto its payroll, vetting operatives and assessing the family backgrounds, education, language skills and personality traits of individuals assigned to sensitive tasks and missions. Loyalty, as well as "energy, [...] good intuition and determination" were particularly valued.[752] The ideal senior member, meanwhile, was a "savvy person, mature, confident, and [understanding] the subject matter of renting, selling, and purchasing homes, including all necessary procedures to lead a civilian life" as well as "knowing how to behave in cities." [753] Individuals wishing to be considered for high administrative positions would also have to compete via selection boards, submitting resumes and writing "something about their vision of the jihadi work in general and providing their opinions and suggestions regarding any of the jihadi fronts."[754]

Al Qaeda developed a clear policy stance relating to the salaries of core members, including the need to "pay them on time."[755] The value of such remuneration packages would later be recognised by ISIS, who offered foreign fighters wages that were five times higher than the average salary in Syrian-controlled territory as an incentive to join its ranks.[756] At the same time, al Qaeda's human resources position did not extend to giving members advances on their salaries in so far as "they could spend the money and come back and ask for a loan," which would put the group "in an uncomfortable position with [respect to] other brothers."[757] Meanwhile, analysis of accounting documents and balance sheets reveals financial contributions towards members' medical costs,[758] whilst the organisation gained a reputation for supporting the families of those who were killed in service.[759] Interestingly, elements of the group's remuneration strategy were extended to jihadi fighters recruited into other loosely affiliated groups operating in Pakistani tribal areas, such as the Haqqani network and Tehrik e-Taliban. The organisation's leadership saw a clear logic in this approach, arguing that "we have to support people. Everyone has heard the deal."[760]

Although these were never fully realised, the organisation also had plans to harness a wider range of professionals and skilled workers in order to sustain the movement, including "engineers, doctors, biologists, pharmacists, researchers" as well as technologically-minded persons with expertise in "laser-guided weapons and how to make death in the form of explosions [...] in an easy, practical and improvised way anywhere on earth." [761] The organisation further broadened the aperture, pointing to the value of "hobbyists, handymen, women, experimenters, discoverers, [and] the courageous" as well as (much more generally) "experts in all fields."[762] Once again, it is perhaps ISIS that came closest to achieving such recruitment objectives through the sheer range of technical and professional roles that were

[751] *Letter from Abu Yahya*, ODNI, p. 11.
[752] *Letter dated November 24*, 2010, ODNI, p. 3.
[753] *Ibid*. The group's leadership also monitored the career progression of those rising through its ranks, keeping reports and commentary on the performance of different members.
[754] *Letter dated 07 August 2010*, ODNI, p. 9.
[755] *Ibid*, p. 12.
[756] E. Solomon, *The Isis economy: meet the new boss*, The Financial Times, January 5, 2015.
[757] *Letter dated 07 August 2010*, ODNI, p. 12.
[758] See for example *AQ Accounting Ledger*, ODNI, Declassified January 19, 2017, pp. 1-4,
[759] See for example: S. Stalinsky, *Saudi Royal Family's Financial Support to the Palestinians, 1998–2003: More than 15 billion Rials ($4 Billion U.S.) Given to 'Mujahideen Fighters' and 'Families of Martyrs*, Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI) Special Report 17, July 3, 2003.
[760] Word of the organisation's contributions would therefore spread, generating further support and positive sentiment for al Qaeda amongst wider affiliate organisations. See also *Letter dated 5 April 2011,* ODNI, p. 3.
[761] *Terror Franchise*, ODNI, Declassified May 20, 2015, p. 1.
[762] *Ibid*.

involved in running the its Islamic State. Illustratively, the group employed legions of professionals, clerks and administrative staff, whilst at the same time commissioning the mass production of bombs and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in specifically designed factories. These combined technical experts with a workforce that included mechanics (whose job it was to make metal screws and bomb parts) and an assembly crew of forced labourers.[763]

7.4 Levers of power

Violence

The above example of bomb-making expertise introduces the topic of one of al Qaeda's – and, in fact, most terrorist groups' – primary lever of power: violence. As we have seen, violent jihad formed a cornerstone of the organisation's strategy and narrative and was correspondingly pursued in various geographic and political contexts. Over the years, al Qaeda targets included a combination of symbolic civilian and economic landmarks, such as the World Trade Centre (in 1993 and again in 2001); government facilities, such as the US embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam (1998); military targets, such as the US military housing complex Khobar, Saudi Arabia (1996), the USS Cole warship in the Yemeni port of Aden (2000), and the Pentagon (2001). [764] Further attacks from affiliated groups and cells against primarily civilian targets were conducted in London, Madrid, Casablanca, Algiers, Baghdad and in the beach resorts of Bali. Many more attacks were either considered and abandoned or foiled, including against senior political figures such as, slightly bizarrely, the President of Uganda.[765]

The main feature of the catalogue of attacks conducted by or in the name of al Qaeda would once again be a reliance on different forms of explosives alongside the use of suicide operatives. This latter choice of tactic constituted the culmination of an evolution in violent non-state actor *modus operandi* in the region which dated back to Hezbollah's bombing of the US embassy in Beirut in 1983. The tactic subsequently migrated to Sunni Palestinian groups, and more specifically, Hamas – a group whose own ideology also grew out of the Muslim Brotherhood and who employed the tactic from 1993 onwards.[766] The rationale behind this choice of tactic was relatively straightforward in so far as it offered a means of inserting operatives close to various targets and, in doing so, inflicting considerable damage, whilst not having to burden oneself with the intricacies of safely exfiltrating individuals from the scene of the attack once this had been executed. The frequency with which the tactic was deployed also further explains al Qaeda's emphasis on the ideological narrative as well as on building a pool of individuals who might willingly be sent to their deaths in the name of the cause.

As already alluded to, al Qaeda increasingly majored on transferring its terrorist expertise and know-how, including with respect to suicide tactics, to affiliated groups around the world. In this respect, the organisation reflected a wider trend within the clandestine international system in which knowledge itself was becoming a prized commodity as well as a strategic

[763] E. Solomon and S. Jones, *Isis' bomb-making expertise leaves lethal legacy*, The Financial Times, October 2016.
[764] The USS Cole blast ripped a 40-foot-wide hole near the ship's waterline, killing 17 American sailors. USS Cole Bombing, History, Federal Bureau of Investigation, https://www.fbi.gov/history/famous-cases/uss-cole-bombing.
[765] *Letter dated 07 August 2010*, ODNI, p. 3.
[766] The 1990s would of course also witness the use of suicide attacks elsewhere, including by the (this time secular) Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam - or 'Tamil Tigers' - in Sri Lanka as well as the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). These tactics had of course previously been used by Japanese Kamikaze pilots during World War II. See for example R. A. Pape, *The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*, American Political Science Review, Vol. 97, No. 3, August 2003, p. 348.

lever of influence.[767] Meanwhile, this migratory dynamic sparked fears within the Western intelligence community that al Qaeda would itself look to acquire expertise from other 'external' specialists such as the rogue Pakistani Nuclear scientist Abdul Qadeer (aka 'AQ') Khan, who had proliferated uranium enrichment technology to Iran, North Korea and Libya.[768] The group's emphasis on building expertise in specific areas such as bomb-making was subsequently emulated by affiliates in contexts such as Iraq, where forensic and fingerprint evidence gathered as part of counter-IED efforts demonstrated how multiple devices could be traced to the same manufacturer.[769]

(Counter) intelligence

High-profile attacks represented the culmination of a chain of components that spanned from the aforementioned recruitment and indoctrination of recruits to meticulous intelligence gathering for the purpose of pre-attack planning. Thus, tactical intelligence-gathering methods included the use of covert surveillance assets such as unmarked cars (that should preferably be used on cloudy days to avoid aerial surveillance); fake identity documents; enemy pattern of life analysis; and canvassing access routes to targets.[770] However, the organisation's intelligence work extended beyond simple target selection, to include strategic assessments produced by a team of analysts perusing materials collected from a range of sources, such as leaked Pentagon documents. These were then disseminated to the organisation's leadership, initially via dedicated online portals.[771] Such assessments were, *inter alia*, used to understand the intentions and strategy of the enemy in the region.[772] Inevitably, the group also placed significant emphasis on open source and media reporting such as "TV news channels to know new ideas and the enemy's tactics and tricks, and also to follow up on the international situation and discover weak points."[773]

Al Qaeda similarly placed significant emphasis on counter-intelligence and operational security (OPSEC), not least because these were considered essential to the survival of the movement. Critically, and perhaps not unwisely, the group had a deep mistrust of even allegedly secure modern communication methods. "We should be careful not to send big secrets by email, especially in Waziristan and the areas around it," a senior al Qaeda member once commented, adding that "we should assume that the enemy can see these emails and only send through email information that can bring no harm if the enemy reads it."[774] The same member also argued that "[we] should not trust [communication technology] just because it is encrypted, because the enemy can easily monitor all email traffic."[775] Al Qaeda's basic reasoning, furthermore, appeared to be that "computer science is not our science" and that "encryption systems work for ordinary people, but not against those who created email and the Internet."[776] Instead, the organisation turned to a small, tightly controlled network of couriers (sometimes referred to by the organisation as "carriers") for the purposes of internal

[767] See also B. Lia, *Al-Qaida's Appeal: Understanding its Unique Selling Points*, Perspectives on Terrorism, Vol.2, No.8, Terrorism Research Initiative, University of Leiden, 2008, available online at: http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/44/html.
[768] See for example C. Collins and D. Frantz, T*he Long Shadow of A.Q. Khan: How One Scientist Helped the World Go Nuclear, Foreign Affairs*, January 2018.
[769] See for example: C. Dillow, *To Catch a Bombmaker*, Popular Science, September 2015, available online at: https://www.popsci.com/to-catch-bomb-maker.
[770] See for example *Letter to son Hamzah*, ODNI, Declassified January 19, 2017, p. 1.
[771] *Report on External Operations*, ODNI, Declassified May 20, 2015, p. 4.
[772] *Letter dated 07 August 2010*, ODNI, p. 13.
[773] *Report on External Operations*, ODNI, p. 4.
[774] *Letter dated 07 August 2010*, ODNI, pp. 9-10.
[775] *Ibid*, p. 10.
[776] *Ibid*, p. 10. This fear may have been further confirmed by the revelations of Edward Snowden, the former U.S. defence contractor-turned-whistleblower who provided details of digital mass-surveillance techniques by intelligence and security services.

communication and for dispatching correspondence and instructions, dealing only with "trusted companions of complete confidence."[777]

Over time, members in positions of responsibility were increasingly asked to take secrecy oaths and to "keep movement low for security reasons."[778] Meetings and gatherings were discouraged, particularly in public spaces, and drivers carrying operatives and/or leaders were instructed to carry "plenty of gas and food before leaving the city to avoid stopping on the road," as intelligence services were assessed to be prone to placing officers in petrol stations as well as "rest areas, restaurants [and] coffee shops."[779] The organisation also conducted lessons learned analysis on the various reasons that led to the compromise or failure of specific operations. These reasons, according to the group's analysis, included penetration by the security services (particularly the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence, ISI), a lack of variation in routine and pattern of life, unnecessary gatherings, the use of the internet and/or telephones, and a failure to blend in with local environments.[780] Such analysis was also used to inform tactical guidance such as the need to avoid being "stingy in the quantity of explosives to be used or the number of martyrs."[781]

Media and communications

Like most terrorist organisations, external communication with potential supporters and sympathetic constituencies via the use of the mass media constituted a key pillar of the organisation's strategy: a means of "gaining the maximum potential leverage [required] to effect fundamental political change."[782] Indeed, the majority of violent terrorist acts conducted by the group over the last three decades – airplane hijackings, high profile attacks and suicide bombings – have been calibrated towards attracting media attention as a means of striking fear amongst some audiences, whilst attracting sympathy from others. What is noteworthy, however, is the sheer sophistication of the group's media strategy which, *inter alia*, involved a longer-term public relations and messaging campaign combining statements, announcements and pre-produced, media-friendly video content. Indeed, the organisation's leadership considered "a huge part of the battle [to be] in the media," with "cable channels today playing a stronger role than [traditional] poets."[783] The media, according to the group's internal correspondence, could decide on the success of a cause and constituted an essential conduit for recruitment and support, "guiding millions of youths in the countries that have revolutions launched in them and in the countries that do not."[784] Letters describing the range of tools available to the organisation similarly highlights the extent to which the media had become "part and parcel [al Qaeda's] fight with [its] criminal enemy," and an integral means of "achieving the objective of incitement to fight."[785] Whilst admittedly the media could not "behead nor shed blood; [...] destroy a base nor dig a trench," it could nevertheless "defeat an army by destroying its morale, defeating the souls of enemy commanders, instilling despair in the depths of their hearts, and turning people against them."[786]

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[777] *Honourable Brother Letter*, ODNI, Declassified January 19, 2017, p. 1.
This approach was used, *inter alia*, to distribute and dispatch documents and pre-recorded tapes containing important content such as orders to subordinates, statements and Fatwas.
[778] *Letter to Abu Bashir*, ONDI, p. 4.
[779] *Ibid*.
[780] *Lessons Learned Following the Fall of the Islamic State*, ODNI, pp. 1-2.
[781] *Letter Addressed to Atiyah*, ODNI, Declassified May 20, 2015, p. 2.
[782] A. Spencer, *Lessons Learnt: Terrorism and the Media*, AHRC Public Policy Series No. 4, Arts and Humanities Research Council, March 2012, p. 8.
[783] *Letter to Abu Bashir*, ODNI, Declassified March 1, 2016, p. 18.
[784] *Al Qaeda letter about efforts in other regions*, ODNI, Declassified January 19, 2017.
[785] *Letter of guidance on leadership*, ODNI, Declassified January 19, 2017, p. 6.
[786] *Ibid*.

Bin Laden, moreover, saw significant opportunities in the spread of satellite television. Whereas television was previously "controlled by the regimes" as a "tool to use to occupy our minds", satellite television and new, independent channels such as Al Jazeera meant "people [could] see with their own minds what is going on instead of having to hear about things from others."[787] Perhaps unsurprisingly therefore, the group issued strict instructions, guidance and protocols on content generation as well as on how to engage with television journalists as well as convey a positive impression of the organisation.[788] Creating engaging and effective media content thus required "patience, repetition, variety, simplicity, good delivery, paying attention to the varying levels of education among people and their various inclinations and tendencies."[789] This also called for an ability to produce high-quality video, audio and written content, drawing on the skills of "brothers who are good with poetry."[790] Moreover, the group closely followed news stories and broadcasts within which it featured, sometimes complaining when channels such as Al Jazeera altered or edited statements and messages.[791]

Over time, the organisation sought to increase its presence and messaging online, including through the publication of its magazine, *Inspire*, which would later be emulated by ISIS's *Dabiq*. Available in the English language, both online publications focused on identity and developing a jihadi 'culture' that could be "embraced in total by followers,"[792] providing guidance to readers on lifestyle choices alongside terrorist instructional material.[793] The online magazine format offered dual benefits, allowing widespread circulation, whilst at the same time presenting a coherent, carefully edited vision and accompanying content (i.e. a party line) "without the distortion found in more interactive forms of online media such as chat rooms and forums".[794] However, despite such attempts at controlling the content and narrative of materials prepared for media dissemination, the group's narrative would nevertheless be reinterpreted and discussed across a range of platforms, including social media, inevitably shaping the ways in which these messages were interpreted.[795] Al Qaeda offshoots also developed their own communication style, some of which differed from the parent organisation. ISIS, for example, implemented a communications strategy that involved a sizeable presence on platforms such as Twitter (now *X*). The latter's approach consisted of disseminating a steady stream of propaganda, accelerating Tweets and posts at times of significant developments via a team of activists employed specifically for the purpose of "flooding the internet with content at high pace"[796] as part of a coordinated effort to create a resounding narrative.[797]

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[787] *Afghani Opportunity*, ODNI, Declassified May 20, 2015, p. 2.
[788] *Gist of Conversation - October 2011*, ODNI, Declassified May 20, 2015, p. 2.
[789] *Letter of guidance on leadership*, ODNI, p. 6.
[790] *Letter dated 07 August 2010*, ODNI, p. 14.
[791] *Letter to Zamaray Sahib*, ODNI, Declassified January 19, 2017, p. 2.
[792] R. J. Bunker and P. L Bunker, *Radical Islamist English-Language Online Magazines Research Guide, Strategic Insights, and Policy Response*, Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press, August 2018, p. 3.
[793] H. J. Ingram, pp. 4-5.
[794] R. J. Bunker and P. L Bunker, pp. 1-2.
[795] See for example A. Meleagrou-Hitchens and N. Kaderbhai, *Research Perspectives on Online Radicalisation: A Literature Review 2006-2016*, International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR), King's College London, 2017, p. 9.
[796] J.M. Berger, T*he Metronome of Apocalyptic Time: Social Media as Carrier Wave for Millenarian Contagion*, Terrorism Research Initiative, Perspectives on Terrorism 9, No. 4, August 2015, p. 63, http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/444/875
[797] Tweets also often included links to other external media content (which, typically, was also produced by the organisation) 'confirming' or strengthening messages. See M. Berger, T*he Metronome of Apocalyptic Time: Social Media as Carrier Wave for Millenarian Contagion*, Terrorism Research Initiative, Perspectives on Terrorism 9, No. 4, August 2015, pp. 63-65, http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/444/875.

Finance

Throughout the years, al Qaeda developed sophisticated arrangements for both acquiring funds and transferring these to affiliated groups. Indeed, money not only constituted a means of sustaining the organisation but also (in a similar vein to its terrorist expertise) a strategic lever that could be harnessed to augment the efforts of local franchises, thus ensuring scalability. Jason Burke thus once compared the organisation to a wealthy university "disbursing research grants and assisting with facilities such as libraries," thus allowing "the ambitions of its pupils, particularly those star pupils who have attracted the attention of the chancellor or the senior lecturers, to be fulfilled."[798] Whilst bin Laden's vast inherited wealth played a catalytic role in the early years, further funds were inevitably required to pursue the full range of the group's ambitious objectives. This meant building on the MAK's network to secure donations from sympathisers and re-distribute these according to operational needs. In turn, payments to affiliates were made using a variety of methods, including charities such as the Benevolence International Foundation (BIF), which was linked to wealthy donors in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, and which held international bank accounts in Switzerland and elsewhere.[799] The 9/11 Commission Report would later reflect on the efficacy of this network, which it referred to as a "golden chain," describing it as a collective of financiers connected through a web of charities and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).[800]

Detailed edgers, statements and internal memos outlining the group's financial transactions highlight the extent to which the organisation considered solid accounting processes as critical to its operational efficacy.[801] Through instructions that might resemble those of financial audit committees within government bureaucracies, operatives we reminded that one "should always be aware of the movement of money and the remaining amounts" as well as the need to produce "semi-monthly reports for the financial official."[802] Guidance was also issued with respect to ways of evading financial surveillance, including by "exchanging money for another currency at a bank in a large city, such as euros and then exchanging the euros into dollars at another bank," whilst "amounts [to] be kept by individuals should not be more than they can handle."[803] As already alluded to, sizeable allocations were paid "directly in support of several jihadi groups" including to the "Haqqani [network] Tehrik e-Taliban Pakistan and others."[804] Ultimately, the group took pride in its financial management systems, with its leadership once congratulating itself on the fact that "we do not have many debts, praise be to God."[805]

7.5 Bringing it together

To no small degree, the principles developed by al Qaeda 'core' represented a pivotal juncture in the evolution of clandestine and, more specifically, terrorist non-state actors. Admittedly, many of the group's ideas and tactics, ranging from airliner hijackings to the use of suicide tactics, were inspired by previous movements.[806] Moreover, its narrative borrowed heavily

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[798] J. Burke, *Al Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam*, Penguin Books, London, 2004, p. 232.
[799] *Ibid*, pp. 250-251.
[800] *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States* (Authorised Edition), W.W. Norton and Company Ltd., New York, p. 55.
The use of grassroots charities in the movement of funds linked to wider extremist organisations was further highlighted by the so-called 'embassy cables' leak of 2010. See *US embassy cables: United Arab Emirates and terrorist funding - the Pashtun connection*, The Guardian, December 2010, https://www.theguardian.com/world/us-embassy-cables-documents/223330.
[801] See for example *Letter directing allocation of funds*, ODNI, Declassified, January 19, 2017.
[802] *Letter dated 07 August 2010*, ODNI, p. 12.
[803] *Letter dated 07 August 2010*, ODNI, p. 11.
[804] Letter dated 5 April 2011, Declassified May 20, 2015, p. 3.
[805] *Ibid.*
[806] Airliner hijackings, the first of which went back to the early 1930s, became a semi-regular feature of international terrorism from 1968 onwards following the commandeering of an Israeli El Al airplane

from the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and the group was only one amongst a long lineage of organisations recognising the power of the mass media in reaching and mobilising potential supporters.[807] However, what was perhaps novel was the way in which these same ideological, operational and communicational levers as well as accompanying organisational blueprints were *combined* and applied in concert over increasingly large distances, paving the way for a new era of insurgencies, including, as in the case of ISIS, terrorist 'proto-states'.

As such, the case study bears direct relevance to this thesis central research question, particularly with respect to the ways in which clandestine non-state actors configure themselves to challenge the authority of states. Chapter 2 posited that non-state actors demonstrated the propensity to establish alternative power structures, including through shadow governance networks. In turn, al Qaeda, whilst not always achieving its aim of supplanting the state, showed how core concepts and intellectual frameworks could be tailored to disparate geographic and political contexts via offshoots and selective partnerships. Indeed, the organisation placed a heavy emphasis on doctrine and guidance, almost acting as a strategy incubator or governance think tank, complete with publications and exportable political templates. The case study also demonstrates how even ideologically conservative groups are capable of exploiting global connectivity and acting as knowledge-distribution nodes facilitating the flow of specialist knowledge (financial, terrorist tactics and so on). In this respect, the group also conceptually approached the notion of a supra-non-state military, security and political entity – an atomised or smaller scale variation on state-led organisations such as NATO or the European Union. Of course, coordinating a devolved network of power also introduced challenges for the organisation, including with respect to exerting more direct control across the franchise (a parallel might be drawn to states seeking to reign in overseas territories seeking increased autonomy).

Even then, and returning to the central investigation, the case study broadly supports the thesis' first hypothesis, relating to clandestine non-state actors' ability to formulate policy, including, as we have seen, by way of templates that could be used by other groups. The group's thinking on both challenging and eroding the authority of states largely hinged on identifying and exploiting rife ecosystems – typically pockets of instability, marginalisation and discontent – and using these as footholds from which to gradually expand its political influence. Turning to the thesis' second hypothesis, the case study reflected a tendency to adopt a structural configuration that could generate resilience against disruption. Al Qaeda achieved this by reducing overall reliance on individuals and placing the emphasis on catalytic ideas that could outlive the organisation, even if the latter was entirely depleted. [808] Finally, and of direct relevance to the thesis' third hypothesis, is the fact that the group not only developed but also applied instruments of power in support of its political objectives. These ranged from its cadre of envoys (a non-state derivative on diplomats) to its complex financial systems built to avoid regulatory detection. As explained, such levers were key to geographic scalability, particularly when injected into offshoots. As such, and perhaps ironically given its anti-American ideology, al Qaeda showed many of the characteristics of a venture capitalist incubator or 'angel fund' seeking to support (political) entrepreneurs showing potential.

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by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), whilst the use of suicide tactics and explosives in the Middle East was catalysed by Hezbollah.
See for example D. L. Byman, *The 1967 War and the birth of international terrorism*, Brookings, May 30, 2017, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2017/05/30/the-1967-war-and-the-birth-of-international-terrorism/.

[807] Indeed, the use of sensationalist acts in the age of the modern media was already apparent at the time of the 1972 Munich Massacre, in which members of the Black September Palestinian group took eleven members of the Israeli Olympic team as hostages.

[808] As one Ayman Al-Zawahiri obituary argued, by the time of his death, al Qaeda's affiliates ranging from "Syria and West Africa to Somalia to Pakistan [already] enjoyed local autonomy, while adhering to the leader's overall strategy." See P. Baker *et al*., U*.S. Drone Strike Kills Ayman al-Zawahri*, Top Qaeda Leader, New York Times, 01 August 2022.

CHAPTER 8 – The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)

The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia's (FARC) value to this thesis' investigation lies not only in its relatively long existence, but also in its complex and hybrid character, which combines elements of a political party, guerilla group and narco-criminal organisation. The group, whose strategic and territorial gains at various times threatened the authority of Colombian state, also provides a useful window into the evolving strategic calculus of an organisation whose political and military objectives evolved from supplanting the state to, ultimately, entering in peace negotiations with the latter. As such, it demonstrates the range of considerations involved in shaping the direction and strategies of clandestine movements as well as the extent to which these are influenced by a combination of internal and external factors. In turn, this chapter successively examines the key tenets of the FARC's political ideology and doctrine, including how this was impacted by the decision to participate in the coca trade; the group's structural and organisational morphology; and the relationship between its access to resources and partners and its strategic objectives.

In doing so, it draws heavily on and is organised around this thesis' analytical framework, the latter of which also provides a basis for structured comparative investigation (this is also consistent with the approach taken within the context of the two previous case studies). The chapter once again adheres to the case study research methodology outlined in Chapter 1, including with respect to the systematic collection, categorisation and synthesis of data. Primary data was privileged wherever possible, drawing on a combination of declassified Colombian and American intelligence reporting, including debriefs with FARC sources, court documents (in both English and Spanish), financial records (some of which were obtained as part of investigations into other clandestine organisations), group propaganda materials (including online, audio and video content), and email correspondence between the group's leadership. These were supplemented by a systemic review of secondary sources, to include published academic articles, monographs and investigative journalism accounts providing insights not only into the organisation's inner-workings but also into the wider strategic context within which it operated. The analysis also sought to reflect diverging views and debates amongst observers, such as with respect to the extent to which the FARC remained driven by its ideology during its latter years. As such, the case study provides a revised take on a group that bridged the gap between a Cold War-era Marxist movement and a modern transnational criminal-insurgent organisation.

8.1 Overview: historical evolution of the FARC

The roots of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia de Pueblo (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – FARC-EP or, more commonly, FARC) can be traced back to the late 1940s, when widespread social upheaval and clashes between leftist Liberals and conversative landholders triggered by the assassination of Liberal leader Jorge Eliecer Gaitan catalysed a decade long civil war – a period widely referred to by scholars as *la Violencia*.[809] Set against the backdrop of the Cold War, instability was driven by a mix of grievances, chief amongst which were political exclusion, poverty, corruption, and, perhaps above all, access to land.[810] These conditions gave rise to an amalgam of rural self-defence groups and armed militias, some of whom effectively carved out their own rural 'independent republics' emphasising economic self-management and defence.[811] Violence receded following a political deal struck in 1958, which resulted in the formation of a Liberal-Conservative coalition

[809] See R. E. Sharpless, *Gaitán of Colombia: A Political Biography*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1978.
[810] See for example, L. Luna, *Colombian Violent Conflict: A Historical Perspective*, International Journal on World Peace, Vol. 36, No. 4, December 2019, pp. 53–84.
[811] M. del Pillar Lopez-Uribe and F. Sanchez Torres, *on the agrarian origins of the civil conflict in Colombia*, London School of Economics Latin America and Caribbean Centre Paper, May 2018, p. 9.

government: the Frente Nacional. However, despite agrarian reforms and the capture of senior armed group leaders, urban guerrilla factions – including the Communist Party of Colombia (PCC)-linked fighters of Pedro Antonio Marín operating in the Marquetalia Republic – continued to wield influence.

Dismissing government attempts to facilitate peasants' access to land in 1961 as insufficient, it was a US-backed campaign by the Colombian Army to reassert control over the independent republics (coined Operation Sovereignty) that finally pushed Marín (also known as Marulanda Vélez and 'Tirofijo'**)** to formally constitute the FARC in 1966.[812] In effect, the movement took on the mantel of the PCC's paramilitary arm, thus protecting the latter's legal status as a political party.[813] The FARC's early rhetoric, oozing Marxist language, highlighted the fact that it was adopting violence as a last resort and pointed to the key objective of securing and protecting land rights for the peasantry.[814] This, Marín claimed, would be achieved through an insurgency campaign aimed at "seizing power from capitalists and transforming the Colombian society according to Marxist doctrine."[815] The FARC's stated geographical focus also expanded, first from the Andean highlands to eastern regions such as Meta and Caqueta and then to entire country, an objective that would require overthrowing the government.[816] Moreover, this period witnessed the creation of other guerrilla groups, most notably the National Liberation Army (ELN) and People's Liberation Army (EPL).[817]

In the early 1970s, a Conservative government plan aimed at removing obstacles to free investment and large-scale commercial agriculture in rural areas exacerbated the conditions (and therefore grievances) of peasants, including by further squeezing small producers and expelling small tenants from their land.[818] During the following decade, disgruntled peasants flocked to the FARC, which grew from a movement of around 500 to an organisation of over 3,500, complete with a centralised hierarchical structure, military wing and political programme.[819] Meanwhile, and spurred on by rising demand for cocaine in the West, displaced peasants began to turn to coca cultivation as both a coping mechanism and as a social mobility strategy.[820] The FARC's leadership initially considered involvement in the drug business to be anathema to its revolutionary cause, whilst fearing that it could fuel corruption within its ranks. However, it altered its policy position in the early 1980s, levying 'protection' taxes from both cultivators and traffickers as a means of funding its armed campaign.[821] The additional influx

[812] C. Lee, *The FARC and the Colombian Left: Time for a Political Solution?*, Latin American Perspectives, Vol. 39, No. 1, January 2012, pp. 28–42; and S. Z. Daly, *The Dark Side of Power-Sharing: Middle Managers and Civil War Recurrence*, Comparative Politics, Vol. 46, No. 3, April 2014, pp. 333–53.
[813] A. Phelan, *Mapping the Pursuit of a 'Combination of All Forms of Struggle': How Colombia's Peace Agreement Complements the FARC's Political Strategy*, Small Wars Journal, February 2017, https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/mapping-pursuit-combination-all-forms-struggle-how-colombias-peace-agreement-complements.
[814] R. A. Karl, *Here's the century-long history behind Colombia's peace agreement with the FARC*, Washington Post, October 1, 2016.
[815] M. del Pillar Lopez-Uribe and F. Sanchez Torres, p. 10.
[816] *Ibid*, pp. 10-11.
[817] N. Offstein and C. Aristizábal, *An Historical Review and Analysis of Colombian Guerrilla Movements: FARC, ELN and EPL*, Revista Desarrollo y Sociedad, September 2003, pp. 99-142.
[818] A. Molano, The Evolution of the FARC: a Guerrilla Group's Long History, North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA), September 2007, https://nacla.org/article/evolution-farc-guerrilla-group%27s-long-history.
[819] *Ibid*.
[820] *Deeply Rooted: Coca Eradication and Violence in Colombia*, International Crisis Group (ICG), February 2021, https://www.crisisgroup.org/latin-america-caribbean/andes/colombia/87-deeply-rooted-coca-eradication-and-violence-colombia.
[821] J. Otis, *The FARC and Colombia's Illegal Drug Trade*, Wilson Center Latin American Program, November 2014, p. 3, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/misc/Otis_FARCDrugTrade2014.pdf

of funds from the coca trade further sustained the movement's growth: by the late mid-to-late 1990s it surged to over 10,000 members.

The FARC's armed campaign witnessed the combined use of tactics ranging from kidnappings, hijackings and bombings to military raids, ambushes, and attacks against government targets as well as critical national infrastructure. Moreover, narco-revenue allowed the organisation to acquire more advanced weaponry and fund a two-track, political-military strategy. Thus, it launched a new political party, the Union Patriótica in 1984, with its presidential candidate securing over 300,000 electoral votes, whilst also making gains in the 1988 municipal elections.[822] By the mid-1990s, military-tactical successes such as the capture of hundreds of Columbian soldiers helped the movement to secure large swaths of territory in the departments of Caquetá and Meta.[823] Paradoxically though, involvement in the drugs business had the effect of catalysing both internal fracture – with some factions prioritising profit over the group's original political objectives – and external threats. By the late 1990s, rival drug trafficking organisations and large landowners had allied themselves with right-wing paramilitary groups and militias known as the United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (or AUC), the latter of whom also often collaborated with the Colombian Army.[824]

In 1998, the Andrés Pastrana administration assumed office on the back of electoral pledges to enter in peace negotiations with the FARC as well as to roll out economic reforms and development projects. This approach also sought security assistance from external actors, primarily the United States, to bolster Colombia's armed forces – a partnership referred to as Plan Colombia.[825] Despite making some inroads, which culminated in the signing of a peace accord in February 2001, the negotiations failed to curb violence. Cease fires and the establishment of a large, demilitarised zone provided FARC units with an opportunity to reconstitute, while the government struggled to, on the one hand, maintain the support of large business groups and traditional power holders opposed to societal change and, on the other, meet wider expectations for a speedy resolution to the conflict.[826] As a result, the Conservative government of President Álvaro Uribe (2002-10), buoyed by continued American funding, pivoted towards a much more aggressive military and active policing counter-insurgency strategy aimed at recapturing and holding guerrilla controlled areas. Uribe's assumption, which was captured in his administration's Democratic Security Policy, was that the FARC would be unlikely to make political concessions unless they were on the backfoot militarily and their sources of funding cut off.[827] Although the policy did not defeat the FARC, it did have the effect of gradually eroding its overall cohesion, power base and freedom of movement, this time more clearly shaping the conditions for political dialogue.

It would take yet another administration, that of President Juan Manual Santos (2010-18), to formally bring the conflict, which had spanned half a century, to an end. A series of mediated talks hosted in Cuba paved the way for the signing of peace accords in November 2016 which*, inter alia*, agreed on a process for disarming, demobilising and reintegrating (DDR) FARC fighters. Critically, the accords succeeded where other peace processes had failed, with the FARC largely living up to its commitment to surrender its weapons. Former demobilised guerrillas also formed a

[822] *FARC*, InSight Crime report, November 2023, https://insightcrime.org/colombia-organized-crime-news/farc-profile/.
[823] *Ibid*.
[824] J. Otis, p. 4.
[825] R. Segura and D. Mechoulan, *Historical Background and Past Peace Processes*, *Made in Havana: How Colombia and the FARC Decided to End the War*, International Peace Institute, February 2017, pp. 5–8.
[826] C. Gonzalez Posso, *Negotiation with the FARC: 1982-2002*, in M. Garcia-Duran, *Alternatives to War: Colombia's peace processes*, Accord, Conciliation Resources and Centro de Investigation y Education Popular (CINEP), 2004, p. 48.
[827] L. E. Taylor II, *Case Analysis: The FARC in Colombia*, Small Wars Journal, May 2020, https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/case-analysis-farc-colombia.

political party, the Common Alternative Revolutionary Force.[828] Even then, a second implementation phase of the accords (i.e. beyond DDR) focussed on addressing structural drivers such as land reform and governance in rural areas has proven more challenging, as has been the roll-out of transitional justice and victim compensation initiatives.[829] Moreover, in August 2019, senior former FARC commanders announced a return to arms, pointing to the Colombian government's alleged "betrayal" of the provisions of the peace accords.[830] Break-away FARC dissident groups such as the Comandos de la Frontera and Carolina Ramirez Front, both comprising less than 500 members, also continued to engage in acts of violence (including against each other) as they vied for control over narco-revenue in the coca-rich state of Putumayo on the Ecuadorian border.[831] Such splinter elements show that despite a formal end to the conflict, the potential for the (re)emergence of violent non-state actors in Colombia has not altogether disappeared.

8.2 Policy choices and strategic direction

Aims and interests

Whilst the FARC's aims and objectives evolved significantly over the course of its fifty-two-year lifespan, it retained elements of its original Marxist-Leninist principles within its policies and rhetoric. For example, Garry Leach argues that the group remained committed to egalitarianism – including with respect to peasant rights, access to land and agricultural reform – throughout its existence.[832] To a degree, the group's overall objectives continued to be anchored in a deep distrust of the Colombian government as well as a reaction to oligarchic and exclusionary agricultural land control policies dating back to Spanish colonial rule.[833] As early as 1952, Ernesto 'Che' Guevara thus noted during a visit to the country that "there is more repression of individual freedom here than in any other country we've been to."[834] This sentiment, which lay at the heart of the Colombian Communist Party's (PCC) manifesto, would act as a galvanising force for the FARC's leadership and its political consistencies. The group also provided regular Marxist ideological training sessions to its fighters, whilst highlighting the extent to which it was born out of a revolutionary movement.[835]

These same 'root' political motivations continued to transpire even after the FARC shifted its policy emphasis from revolution and military defeat of the government to more a more peaceful political strategy, albeit one that continued to highlight core grievances. This policy shift occurred as well as ebbed and flowed over the course of three and a half decades, paving the way for a dual-track (military and political) approach. It started with the formation of a political wing in the mid-1980s, the Unión Patriótica (UP) party,[836] and climaxed at the time of the

[828] T. E. Flores and J. F. Vargas, *Colombia: Democracy, Violence, and the Peacebuilding Challenge*, Conflict Management and Peace Science, Vol. 35, No. 6, November 2018, pp. 581–86.
[829] T. Piconne, Peace with Justice: The Colombian Experience with Transitional Justice, Brookings Reports, July 2019, p. 3.
[830] *Colombia FARC Guerrillas "Return to Arms*", International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), https://casebook.icrc.org/case-study/colombia-farc-guerrillas-return-arms.
[831] See *'Comandos de la Frontera'*, InSight Crime, June 2022, https://insightcrime.org/es/noticias-crimen-organizado-colombia/comandos-de-la-frontera/.
[832] G. M. Leech, *The FARC: the Longest Insurgency*, Black Point (NS): Fernwood Publishing Ltd, 2011, pp.38-56.
[833] Ibid, p.5.
[834] M. Deas, *Putting Up' with Violence: Ernesto Guevara, Guevarismo, and Colombia*, in P. Drinot (ed.), *Che's Travels: The Making of a Revolutionary in 1950s Latin America*, Durham (NC): Duke University Press, 2010, pp. 127–47.
[835] N. Bilotta, *A Brief Look at FARC's Origins in Colombia*, Geopolitical Monitor, April 2017, https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/a-brief-look-at-farcs-origins-in-colombia/.
[836] R. Segura and D. Mechoulan, pp. 5-6. See also M. García-Sánchez and R. E. Carlin, *The FARC in the Public Eye: Negotiations, Integration, and Political Participation*, Journal of Politics in Latin America, Vol.12, Issue 3, Dec 2020, pp. 239-344.

group's negotiations with Colombian government in 2016. During the latter, the FARC stressed the importance of political representation of key FARC constituents as the basis for securing guaranteed seats in Colombia's House of Representatives and Senate.[837]

Nevertheless, the most significant change amongst the FARC policies was arguably catalysed by the decision to become involved in narco-trafficking. Although initially viewing the coca business as a threat to its revolutionary goals and even going to the lengths of imposing cultivation bans in the areas it controlled, the group – like most clandestine non-state actors – required funding to sustain its armed campaign.[838] Moreover, spiralling demand for cocaine in the United States and the corresponding production boom in Colombia (which also saw the meteoric rise of Pablo Escobar's Medellin Cartel) meant that coca-derived revenue provided the most direct means of purchasing weapons and paying fighters. Protecting coca cultivation also offered a means of securing the consent of peasant cultivators – a key source of political support. Perhaps inevitably, narco-derived income altered incentives within the group to the extent that by the mid-1980s, the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) concluded that much of the FARC's leadership "was as much attracted to […] banditry as to ideological causes," even while acknowledging that the group had not entirely lost sight of its longer-term revolutionary struggle.[839]

Furthermore, court documents reveal that in the late 1990s, the FARC's leadership voted unanimously on new resolutions that included expanding coca-production in FARC-controlled areas; establishing new production laboratories and manufacturing processes (such as using higher quality precursor chemicals); and opening further international distribution routes.[840] However, the FARC's decision to deepen its involvement in the coca trade was somewhat double-edged. On the one hand, it (at least theoretically) provided a means of expanding the FARC's political objectives and ambitions as well as of waging protracted war. On the other, it arguably played a role in shifting the group's overall emphasis away from installing a Marxist government in Bogota towards the preservation and consolidation of its sources of illicit income.[841] Thus, for the second half of its life, the FARC essentially pursued a hybrid set of objectives, blending its original narratives and rhetoric with more complex political economy incentives on the ground.

Strategic logic and sequencing

As might be expected from a Marxist movement, the FARC borrowed heavily from mid-20th century guerrilla warfare principles, including the (now familiar) teachings of Mao Tse Tung. In a strategic logic broadly drawing on Mao's three phases of warfare, the group's initial focus in the 1960s and 1970s could be described as one that prioritised organisation and consolidation – in effect Mao's 'strategic defensive' stage.[842] Frontal clashes with security forces were avoided, with the group instead opting for hit and run tactics, ambushes, and raids. The principal objective during this period was therefore to survive as a movement in the face of a stronger opponent while shaping the political ground for its longer-term campaign, including by mobilising support amongst the peasantry. As the group increased in size and potency in the late 1970s, buoyed by access to revenue, weapons and fighters, it was

[837] M. García-Sánchez and R. E. Carlin, p. 241.
[838] S. V. Norman, *The FARC and the War on Drugs in Colombia*, Universidad de los Andes Conference Paper, May 2013, pp. 10.11.
[839] *Colombia: Prospects for Peace*, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Directorate of Intelligence, April 1985 (Declassified 2012), p.9, https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP86T00589R000200220004-8.pdf.
[840] *Leaders of Colombian Narco-Terrorist Organisation Plead Guilty in U.S. District Court to Conspiring to import Tons of Cocaine to the United States,* United States Attorney Southern District of New York, December 16, 2009, p. 2.
[841] See also J. Otis, pp. 3-4.
[842] A. Rabasa and P. Chalk, *Colombian Labyrinth, The Synergy of Drugs and Insurgency and Its Implications for Regional Stability*, Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2001, p. 81.

effectively able to transition to what resembled Mao's 'strategic stalemate' phase, characterised by a more cohesive military campaign and a larger scale infiltration of territory. Whether the FARC was subsequently able to fully transition to what resembled Mao's third, 'strategic offensive' phase of protracted warfare is a matter of debate, thus calling for more detailed examination.

To be sure, the group did demonstrate the ability to conduct complex military action against Colombian army installations from the mid-1990s. For example, in August 1996, it overran a base in Las Delicias in the department of Putumayo, killing around thirty army personnel and capturing a further sixty.[843] Two years later, a FARC force numbering some seven hundred fighters surrounded and decimated the elite 52nd counter-guerrilla battalion of the Colombian army's 3rd mobile brigade.[844] Following these gains, the government of then-President Andrés Pastrana ceded a swath of territory roughly the size of Switzerland (42,000 km^2) to rebels in the southern departments of Meta and Caquetá.[845] However, and despite these gains, the group struggled to translate operational-level gains and the occasional strategic-level success into wider-reaching political control. This was partly because it struggled to maintain legitimacy, particularly within the context of high-profile terrorist attacks, and partly because it had to contend with the dual pressures of battling paramilitary groups and increasingly capable government counter-insurgency forces.

Separately, observers such as Carlos Ospina Ovalle have argued that the FARC, rather than displaying a clear, linear progression between successive phases of guerrilla warfare, pursued elements of these phases simultaneously through what he refers to as the Vietnamese-inspired concept of "interlocking war."[846] Thus, (at times hyper-local) territorial gains and political mobilisation – sought both on the battlefield and through various negotiations – were threaded across campaign objectives throughout the group's existence.[847] Such an description of the group's evolving calculus also supports the aforementioned assessment that the group increasingly opted for a two-track military-political strategy, with the ability to surge one or the other approach depending on its position in relation to its longer term objectives.

The hybrid as well as evolving morphology of the FARC also had a bearing on its strategic logic. Here was a movement that had to balance political, military and criminal-economic objectives, whilst trying to retain an element of ideological legitimacy. At times, these various lines of effort could be combined, such as within the context of mobilising the political support of coca cultivators by organising protests against government crop-eradication programmes. Historical CIA reporting also highlights the extent to which the group strategically leveraged political dialogues, truces and cease-fires to reconstitute its forces and rebuild its strength, whilst in reality having "no intention of abandoning the armed struggle."[848] Arguably however, this balancing act also led to strategic drift and competing internal interests, undermining the Clausewizian logic of clearly aligning one's ways and means to the political end state. Moreover, and as hinted at above, the character of the FARC's military strategy and, in particular, the use of terrorist tactics, including assassinations and kidnappings, contributed to galvanising public sentiment against the group. Illustratively, one anti-FARC protest held in

[843] *Interrogantes Sobre El Asalto A Las Delicias*, El Tiempo, September 3, 1996, https://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-489049.
[844] See T. Marks*, Colombian Army Adaptation to FARC Insurgency*, US Army War College publication, January 2022, p. 8.
[845] C. Sabatini and R. Berger, *Santos Holds the Line Against the FARC – And Wins*, Americas Quarterly, November 2011, https://www.americasquarterly.org/blog/santos-holds-the-line-against-the-farc-and-wins/.
[846] C. Ospina Ovalle, *Legitimacy as the center of gravity in Hybrid warfare*, Journal of Military and Strategic Studies (JMSS), Vol. 17, Issue 4, June 2017, p. 255.
[847] Ibid, pp.254-262.
[848] *Colombia: Prospects for Peace*, CIA, p. 11.

2008 in Bogota counted between 500,000 and 2 million protesters, with further protests being held in other cities around the world.[849]

Spheres of influence and territorial control

As is often the case with insurgencies and guerrilla movements, territorial control was a critical component of the FARC's strategy. This not only constituted an end but also a means of consolidating its economic and military gains as well as its power base. Over the years, the group secured territory spanning from Southern Colombia to the Eastern Plaines situated near the Venezuelan border, whilst also establishing a presence in the southwestern departments of Valle del Cauca, Cauca, and Nariño as well as in western departments such as Antioquia and Chocó.[850] By 2002, the group was present in around half of Colombia's territory, or in 514 of the country's 1098 municipalities.[851] With most of Colombia's population concentrated in urban centres, the FARC's territorial strategy largely focussed on underdeveloped rural communities where the state's presence was limited.[852]

In turn, the group essentially sought to harness the absence of formal (i.e. state) governance by promoting itself as a protector of marginalised communities and even launching local infrastructure projects. For example, FARC-built roads – which involved engineers and heavy machinery such as bulldozers – increased the group's freedom of movement and likely secured a degree of legitimacy amongst local populations.[853] Such activities can be broadly situated within the logic of erecting alternative non-state actor governance systems in marginalised communities, whilst also underlining the extent to which infrastructure projects are not solely within the purview of the state. Roads and bridges built by the FARC in localities such as Puerto Guzmán (Putumayo department) in the 1990s offered an alternative to dangerous river travel as well as a key enabler for the transport of coca, the principal local cash crop.[854]

Critics of successive governments' various attempts at striking political deals with the FARC point to the fact that the group consistently harnessed talks to expand its geographic footprint in strategic locations.[855] Indeed, and as we have seen, the group exploited the so-called 'demilitarized zone' (DMZ) consisting of territory ceded by the Pastrana government in Caquetá and Meta in the late 1990s.[856] While the political incentive behind Pastrana's concession was to create space for negotiations, the group transformed the DMZ into a logistical hub for the purpose of ammunition stockpiling, attack planning and hostage-holding.[857] Subsequently, Colombia's reinvigorated military offensive launched by the Uribe administration in the early 2000 and continued under President Santos significantly reduced the group's territorial control, displacing its fighters to more remote and sparsely populated

[849] C. Lee, *The FARC and the Colombian Left: Time for a Political Solution?*, Latin American Perspectives, Vol.39, No.1, January 2012, p. 28
[850] J. Petras and M. M. Brescia, *The FARC Faces the Empire*, Latin American Perspectives, Vol. 27, Issue 114, September 2000, p. 134; See also *FARC* (In Sight Crime, 2023).
[851] *Improving Security Policy in Colombia*, International Crisis Group (ICG) Report, June 2010, p. 2.
[852] K. Cragin and B. Hoffman, *Violence in Colombia, in Arms Trafficking and Colombia*, 1st ed., Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2003, p. 10.
[853] S. Uribe, S. Otero-Bahamón, I. Penaranda, *Hacer el estado: carreteras, conflicto y órdenes locales en los territorios de las FARC*, Reviata de Estudios Sociales, No.75, January 2021, pp.87-100.
[854] Ibid. See also: S. Otero-Bahamón *et al.*, *Seeing like a Guerrilla: the logic of infrastructure in the building of insurgent orders*, Geoforum, Vol.133, July 2022, pp. 198-207.
[855] See for example: F. E. Marre, *FARC'S Façade and Other Major Obstacles to a Genuine Peace in Colombia*, Counter Terrorist Trends and Analysis, Vol.6, Issue 6, July 2014, p. 7.
[856] T. Marks, p. 8.
[857] K. Cragin and B. Hoffman, p. 11.

areas, thus reducing its ability to exert influence over local political constituencies.[858] This arguably pushed FARC elements to further capitalise on criminal activities, including trafficking across the long (2200 kilometres) Venezuelan border, as well as establish high-volume processing laboratories in Bolivia.[859]

External relations

The FARC's relations with both state and non-sate actors were complex and varied. Coming of age within the broader context of the Cold War, the group developed connections with Soviet bloc and/or aligned countries, with its fighters being trained at different times by Cuban and El Salvadorian operatives.[860] Moreover, from the late 1970s to early 1990s, the Vietnamese armed forces both received fighters at a specialist Sapper Training School, where it provided FARC personnel with knowledge of bomb-making and explosives, and provided more localised training opportunities via a clandestine team stationed in Nicaragua.[861] Cuba likely played a central role in facilitating this support, including by acting as an intermediary for Vietnamese trainers,[862] whilst at times also providing weapons directly to the FARC. [863] The so called 'FARC files', a large trove of documents attributed to Luis Edgar Devía Silva (Aka Raúl Reyes), the head of the FARC's International Committee (the COMINTER), which was recovered during a 2008 raid in Ecuador, further exposed the group's links to Venezuela. The files pointed to financial assistance by former Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez, whilst suggesting that Venezuelan army officers assisted the group in obtaining capabilities such as rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs).[864] Responsibility for liaising with the FARC fell to Venezuelan General Hugo Carvajal, head of military intelligence, and Interior Minister Ramón Rodríguez Chacín, the latter of whom reciprocally suggested that the FARC share its knowledge of guerrilla warfare, including "modes of operation, explosives, camps in the jungle, preparing ambushes, logistics and mobility; […] everything that would be required to react appropriately to a US invasion."[865] The fact that Reyes, who was killed in the raid, appeared to operate freely from Ecuador also raises questions about the extent to which that country's government may have turned a blind eye to his presence on its soil.

The FARC's relations with clandestine non-state actors were somewhat more erratic, ranging from loose alliances to open warfare. FARC elements forged cross-border smuggling partnerships, including with criminal networks in Venezuela, Bolivia and Peru (the latter of which shares a 1,600km-long border with Colombia) as well as the Mexican Sinaloa, Beltrán Leyva, and Jalisco Nueva Generación cartels controlling facilitation routes into the United States.[866] Such partnerships continued to be fostered by remnants of the FARC in the wake

[858] *The Day after Tomorrow: Colombia's FARC and the End of Conflict*, Crisis Group Latin America Report No.53, December 2014, p. 5.
[859] See for example: R. Graham, *FARC Rebels Tied to Traffickers in Bolivia*, InSight Crime, December 2011, p.1, https://insightcrime.org/news/brief/farc-rebels-tied-to-traffickers-in-bolivia/.
[860] See T. Marks, *A Model Counterinsurgency: Uribe's Colombia (2002-2006) vs. FARC*, Military Review Vol.87, Issue 2, Mar-Apr 2007, p. 50.
[861] M. L. Pribbenow, *Vietnam Trained Commando Forces in Southeast Asia and Latin America*, Wilson Centre Cold War International History Project, Dossier No.28, December 2011, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/vietnam-trained-commando-forces-southeast-asia-and-latin-america.
[862] Ibid.
[863] See K. Cragin and B. Hoffman, p. 15.
[864] *'The FARC files'*, The Economist, May 22, 2008, https://www.economist.com/the-americas/2008/05/22/the-farc-files.
[865] J. Glüsing, *How Hugo Chavez Courted FARC*, Spiegel International, June 04, 2008, https://www.spiegel.de/international/world/the-colombian-connection-how-hugo-chavez-courted-farc-a-557736.html.
[866] S. Corona, *FARC guerrillas working with Mexican cartels to ship cocaine into the US*, El País, 06 November 2015, https://english.elpais.com/elpais/2015/11/06/inenglish/1446805362_627422.html#.

of the 2016 peace agreement, albeit at a much more localised scale. Over the years, the FARC tolerated its fellow rural revolutionary Marxist movement, the National Liberation Army (ELN), and the two groups occasionally collaborated in their respective strongholds, whilst establishing lines of communications between their highest leadership structures (i.e., the FARC's Secretariate and the ELN's equivalent Central Command body).[867] However, and perhaps inevitably, the two also competed for financial resources as well as control of trafficking corridors (primarily on the Venezuelan border) – a dynamic which at times boiled over into violent skirmishes.[868]

Such tensions paled in comparison to the animosity that arose between the FARC and the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC), a coalition of pre-existing right-wing paramilitary groups supported by landowners, ranchers and businessmen that gained significant momentum from 1997 onwards. Whilst retaining a narrative of thwarting the expansion of leftist guerrillas in the country, the AUC became increasingly involved in drug trafficking activities (elements of the groups also had historical connections to cartels, including Pablo Escobar's Medellin-based operation and the Ochoa Brothers).[869] Moreover, the AUC acted as a de facto-proxy for elements of the Colombian army within the context of counter-insurgency operations, receiving weapons and ammunition from the latter, whilst enjoying ties to the political elite during the tenure of President Uribe.[870] The highly potent and violent AUC repeatedly clashed head-on with both the FARC and the ELN, displacing guerrillas from swaths of the country, whilst also targeting communities from which they drew support.[871] In turn, the rise of the paramilitaries and alternative non-state power blocks both escalated Colombia's civil war and compelled the FARC to fight on multiple as well as concurrent fronts, further reducing their ability to focus on their original objectives.

8.3 Organisational structure

Possibly comprising as many as 20,000 members at its highpoint, the FARC opted for what (at least on paper) resembled a traditional vertical operating model as well as command-and-control structure. Its most senior decision-making body consisted of the Secretariat, which constituted the group's chief political organ, whilst also providing direction relating to military strategy.[872] It was composed of around seven senior members, including chief negotiators and high-ranking commanders. The Secretariat was led by FARC founding member Manuel Marulanda Velez until his death in May 2008. Valez not only served as overall leader but also played an instrumental role in shaping the group's direction, including by calling successive

[867] *Colombia: Moving Forward with the ELN?,* International Crisis Group, Policy Briefing No.16, October 2007, pp. 5-6.
[868] Ibid.
[869] *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia – AUC*, InSight Crime, June 2024, https://insightcrime.org/colombia-organized-crime-news/auc-profile/.
[870] *Declassified Documents Key to Judgment Against Colombian Paramilitary*, National Security Archive, October 2021, https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/colombia/2021-10-04/declassified-documents-key-judgment-against-colombian; and *The Friends of 'El Viejo": Declassified Records Detail Suspected Paramilitary, Narco Ties of Former Colombian President Uribe*, National Security Archive, August 2020, https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/colombia/2020-08-31/friends-el-viejo-declassified-records-detail-suspected-paramilitary-narco-ties-former-colombian.
[871] See L. Luna, *Colombian Violent Conflict*, International Journal on World Peace, Vol. 36, No. 4, December 2019, pp.53-84; and A. Rabasa et al., *Counter-insurgency Transition Case Study: Colombia*, *From Insurgency to Stability: Volume II: Insights from Selected Case Studies*, RAND, 2011, p. 43.
[872] *FARC Guerrilla Commanders and Paramilitary Group Members Comment on Their Organizations and Activities*, US Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA), Intelligence Information Report, February 1999 (Declassified October 2021), p. 2, https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/document/25109-document-7-farc-guerrilla-commanders-and-paramilitary-group-members-comment-their.

guerrilla conferences setting the group's political and strategic course.[873] Guillermo Leon Saenz (Aka Alfonso Cano), a former anthropologist turned hard-line ideologue who had advocated for the use of hit and run tactics in an approach dubbed *Plan Renacimiento* (or Rebirth), subsequently took over the mantle until he was killed by Colombian forces in 2011, only to be replaced by Timoleon Jimenez, Aka Timochenko.[874] In turn, the fact that the organisation was able to manage leadership transitions reflects a degree of structural resilience likely aided by tried and tested internal processes.

Sitting alongside the Secretariat – and featuring Secretariat members - was a Central High Command (Estado Mayor), which counted two dozen members, and which was responsible for providing direction to sub-formations as well as appointing local commanders. Reporting to the Central High Command were seven *blocs*, each comprising their own support staffs, with responsibility for different geographic zones.[875] *Blocs* were further split into local military units, or *fronts*, counting up to 300 members. [876] These *fronts*, which sometimes also comprised smaller columns, companies and squads, varied in number over the course of the years. For example, the FARC's strength grew from around 32 *fronts* in 1986 to 60 *fronts* in 1995.[877] Despite the FARC's nominally vertical structure, declassified intelligence assessments reveal the extent to which the localised character of the *front* model offered a certain degree of independence and flexibility, including with respect to raising funds.[878] At times, the group combined multiple fronts and columns to create larger, massed combat formations capable of conducting more conventional military operations. Specialised mobile columns within *fronts* could also be bolstered to constitute a rough equivalent to the concept of a military battlegroup, as was seen within the context of the 'Teofilo Forero' column's defeat of the 52nd Counter-guerrilla Battalion in March 1998. [879] Meanwhile, the *blocs* provided a form of operational-level "transmission belt" between Central High Command strategic planners and tactical-level units.[880]

FARC *fronts* also provided a core localised population-control as well as rudimentary governance function. This included functioning as a shadow judiciary body via 'people's courts', disseminating FARC propaganda and encouraging economic output in their respective areas of responsibility.[881] As cadre structures (i.e. organisational units), *fronts* were also envisaged as having the ability to multiply over time once these had secured their population base and means of sustainment, with new *fronts* being spun off within conquered territory.[882]

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[873] See for example: *Narcotics Reward Programme: Pedro Antonio Marin*, Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, US Department of State, https://2009-2017.state.gov/j/inl/narc/rewards/115255.htm.
[874] *Guillermo Leon Saenz Vargas, alias 'Alfonso Cano'*, In Sight Crime, March 2017, https://insightcrime.org/colombia-organized-crime-news/guillermo-leon-saenz-vargas-alfonso-cano/.
[875] D. Cunnigham, *Brokers and key players in the internationalization of the FARC*, Studies in Conflict and Terrorism, Vol. 36, Issue 6, May 2013, p. 482.
[876] *Colombia: an overview of the Farc's military structures*, European Strategic Intelligence and Security Centre (ESISC), December 2010, https://www.esisc.org/publications/briefings/colombia-an-overview-of-the-farcs-military-structure.
[877] *The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the Illicit Drug Trade*, Transnational Institute, June 1999, https://www.tni.org/en/publication/the-revolutionary-armed-forces-of-colombia-farc-and-the-illicit-drug-trade.
[878] *Colombia's insurgency: Military Implications From Las Delicias to Mitu*, Defence Intelligence Assessment, US Department of Defense (DoD), February 1999 (Declassified), p.2.
[879] Defence Intelligence Assessment (1999), p. 3.
[880] A. Shesterinina, *Committed to Peace: The Potential of Former FARC-EP Midlevel Commanders as Local Leaders in the Peace Process*, University of Sheffield Political Economy Research Institute, 2020, p. 6.
[881] Defence Intelligence Assessment (1999), pp. 2-3.
[882] Ibid.

[883] Furthermore, *fronts* became a focal point for narcotics production and trafficking from the late 1990s, featuring appointed members responsible for coordinating these activities. Judicial documents reveal how key *front* coordinators, the likes of which included Juan Jose Martinez-Vega (16th *front*) and Erminso Cuevas Cabrera (14th *front*), took on a central role both in overseeing high-volume cocaine laboratories and facilitating onward trafficking via cross-border networks.[884] Moreover, the cases of Rodriguez Mendieta (Aka "Ivan Vargas") and Gerardo Aguiler Ramirez ("Aka Cesar"), former commanders of the FARC's 24th *front* and 1st *front,* show how *front* commanders themselves became active in the trade, including with respect to brokering partnerships and opening new international trafficking routes.[885]

Recruitment, training, and support

The FARC's early recruitment strategy placed a significant emphasis on its Marxist-revolutionary ideological narrative and principles, which was tailored to the circumstances as well as political grievances of rural populations – particularly peasant farmers and 'campesinos' locked out of Colombia's elite bargain.[886] The FARC also played on the common themes of status, purpose and meaning in the context of its recruitment drives alongside gendered narratives. For example, interviews with former female members highlight the extent to which the offer of a life of adventure and the promise (rather than necessarily reality) of gender equality played a role in their recruitment.[887] Female role models such as the notorious 'Karina' (Elda Neyis Mosquera), who rose through the ranks to command the 47th *front,* provided an example of such advancement within the group.[888] At the same time, and perhaps unsurprisingly, declassified intelligence documents detailing interviews with FARC members suggest that many recruits were driven by financial considerations, including the perception that "they had no other opportunities for employment."[889] Furthermore, the group paid rural recruits working as seasonal workers on coca plantations a salary of around US$250 per month to serve as active members in military camps for periods spanning between six months and a year.[890] Intelligence documents also reveal that fighters wishing to go on leave, such as to visit their families, were given a stipend and had their travel expenses paid for them.[891] Over time, the need to sustain its prolonged armed campaign led the group to engage in forced recruitment, with human rights organisations reporting on the coerced mobilisation of minors under the age of fifteen (the group considered child soldiers to be easily mouldable, according

[883] This logic resembles a variation of the counter-insurgency strategy of 'ink-spots' in which recaptured territory provides the basis for campaign expansion via focussed 'clear, hold and build' activities.
[884] *Two Top Associates of Colombian Narco-Terrorist Organization Found Guilty of Conspiring to Import Tons of Cocaine into the United States*, United States Attorney, Southern District of New York, April 2010, pp. 1-4.
[885] *Leaders of Colombian Narco-Terrorist Organization Plead Guilty in US District Court to Conspiring to Import Tons of Cocaine into the United States*, United States Attorney, Southern District of New York, December 2009, p. 2.
[886] K. Cragin and B. Hoffman, p. 4.
[887] K. Stanski, *Terrorism, Gender, and Ideology: A Case Study of Women who join the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)*, Terrorism, Gender and Ideology, In J. J. F. Forest (ed.), *The Making of a Terrorist; Recruitment, Training and Root Causes*, Vol. 1, Westport: Praeger, 2006, pp.140-143.
[888] See S. Gill, *Colombia releases one of FARC's most feared former commanders*, Colombia Reports, November 2, 2017, https://colombiareports.com/amp/colombia-releases-one-farcs-feared-former-commanders/.
[889] US Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) Report (1999), p. 2.
[890] S. Logan and A. Morse, *The FARC's International Presence*, Seguranca & Democracia, December 2006, pp.4.
[891] F*ARC Guerrilla Commanders and Paramilitary Group Members Comment on Their Organizations and Activities*, US Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), Intelligence Information Report, February 1999 (Declassified October 2021), p.2

to sources).[892] Forced recruitment also took place amongst socially vulnerable cleavages and groups, most notably indigenous and Afro-Columbian populations.[893]

The training of new FARC recruits took several forms. Typically, these involved a three-month programme comprising basic training, including small arms handling (typically AK-47 variant and M-16), fire-and-manoeuvre tactics and jungle warfare.[894] Military instructors used a combination of classroom-based lessons and applied training, such as with respect to military planning processes and the execution of 'set piece' operations such as ambushes.[895] This instruction was likely complemented by more specialised training on specific weapon systems such as sniper rifles, mines and 60 and 81mm mortars.[896] Training was also accompanied by ideological indoctrination, with programmes placing a heavy emphasis on group identity (which was reinforced through the frequent use of war names) and discipline, including adherence to the group's core principles and hierarchy.[897] In a recurrent theme amongst armed non-state actor groups, the FARC's ability to establish training infrastructure and deliver formal instruction was directly correlated with territorial control. Thus, the government's introduction of a new demilitarised zone in 1998 (see above) allowed it to double the size of its training camps. Conversely, the group was in its later years compelled to adopt more rudimentary 'on the job' training following military setbacks.

The group featured several categories of fighters and members within its ranks. Full-time, uniformed fighting units were complemented by urban Bolibarian militias (*milicias bolivarianos)* as well as popular militias (*milicias populares*). Whilst receiving military training, members of these militias tended to adopt civilian attire and live at home, typically establishing a presence in population centres and conducting intelligence, revenue collection and, occasionally, subversive activities.[898] In a logic somewhat akin to Che Guevarra's *foquismo*, the militias – created following a Central General Staff Plenary Session in 1989 – were intended as a vanguard that could bolster an eventual general offensive within strategic localities.[899] In effect, the militias also provided a foothold into potential constituencies of support, augmenting wider recruitment, propaganda and infrastructure-development efforts. Indeed, and despite the appeal of the group's Marxist principles amongst segments of the population, the FARC had to navigate the inherent tension between, on the one hand, maintaining a core radical base and, on the other, gaining the support of the 'masses'.[900] Thus, embedding militias within the local population was likely perceived (at least in theory) as a means of increasing the group's visibility – and, therefore, legitimacy – amongst the wider public.

Ultimately however, the FARC's predatory activities, pivot towards drugs trafficking and use of violence gradually eroded popular support for its cause. Illustratively, studies tracking

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[892] See for example: *'You'll Learn Not to Cry': Child Combatants in Colombia*, Human Rights Watch, September 2003, pp. 29-30.
[893] *Improving Security Policy in Colombia* (ICRG 2010), pp. 1-5.
[894] K. Stanski, p. 143.
[895] *Can the FARC Still Train Their Soldiers?*, InSight Crime, March 2011, https://insightcrime.org/news/analysis/inside-can-the-farc-still-train-their-soldiers/.
[896] See for example: *UN observers Conclude FARC-EP arms removal process in Colombia*, United Nations, August 2017, https://news.un.org/en/story/2017/08/563392.
[897] *FARC - Rebels with a Cause?,* Council on Hemispheric Affairs, July 2010, https://coha.org/farc-–- rebels-with-a-cause/.
[898] *Sobreviviendo al infierno: Las Farc desde adentro, Ministerio de Defensa Nacional*, Bogota, p.132, https://www.mindefensa.gov.co/irj/go/km/docs/Mindefensa/Documentos/descargas/Prensa/Documentos/SobreviviendoAlInfierno.pdf.
[899] J. Contreras, *FARC-EP. Insurgency, terrorism, and drug trafficking in Colombia*: Memory and discourse, Madrid: Dykinson, 2018, pp. 243-257.
[900] C. Roux, *Communicating the Revolution: A Cultural Analysis of FARC Propaganda and its Reception in Colombia (1964-2022)*, Université Paris-Panthéon-Assas / Universidad Nacional de Colombia, February 2023.

casualty rates during Colombia's civil war show that 81.5% of the victims of violence were civilians, mostly peasants.[901] Disengagement also extended to the rank and file of the organisation, with desertion rates climbing significantly from the 2000s (Colombia's Ministry of Defense reported over 19,000 deserters between 2002 and 2017).[902] This erosion of internal cohesion was further exacerbated by the loss of key leaders following counter-insurgency operations conducted by the Colombian military. Furthermore, observers examining the range of factors that contributed to a reduction in support for the FARC point to a shift away from collective identity and ideologies to individual interests.[903] In turn, the changing tide of public perception, combined with internal fragmentation, played an important role in convincing the FARC to join the negotiating table in 2016, paving the way for demobilisation. Following this process, the new political arm of the ex-FARC continued to struggle with the legacy of the movement, failing to secure significant support or to repair fractures in its diminished political base.[904]

8.4 Levers of power

Military and intelligence capabilities

As we have seen, and despite at times coming close to resembling a conventional force, the FARC's military strategy and accompanying capabilities largely remained within the realm of guerilla warfare. Still, an agenda of an annual meeting of the FARC Secretariate published in August 2000 by the Colombian weekly magazine Semana featured a statement by the group's leadership stressing that "the acquisition of arms […] has permitted a qualitative jump in our process of becoming an Ejército del Pueblo (Army of the People)."[905] Like other Latin American armed groups, the FARC drew heavily on Cold-War era stockpiles of weapons gifted by the United States and former Soviet Union to their respective proxies that had since proliferated across the sub-continent.[906] The group's weapons of choice for fighting units consisted primarily of Kalashnikov AK-47 variants, Rocket Propelled Grenade launchers and Belgian-made FAL, Israeli-made Galil and US-made Barret assault rifles, which were further bolstered by mortars along with an ample supply of ammunition (primarily 7.62 calibre rounds).[907] Some sources suggest that the FARC imported just under half of its weapons by air via small, single engine charter aircraft departing from Brazil.[908] US intelligence estimates concluded that the group also likely ran its own munitions factories capable of producing mortars and rifle-mounted grenades.[909]

The group's tactical playbook, which drew heavily on the guerilla's *modus operandi*, including an emphasis on asymmetric activities ranging from ambushes to kidnappings and assassinations, called for capabilities that fell within what might be described as the terrorist's and insurgent's arsenal. It manufactured and employed (with a degree of success) improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and makeshift anti-personnel mines, typically using either conventional ordnance such as shells or commercial-grade explosives as the main charge.

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[901] A. Blanco *et al*., *Violent Extremism and Moral Disengagement: A Study of Colombian Armed Groups*, Journal of Interpersonal Violence, Vol. 37, Issue 2, March 2020, p. 427.
[902] E. Nussio and J. E. Ugarriza, *Why Rebels Stop Fighting: Organizational Decline and Desertion in Colombia's Insurgency*, International Security, Vol. 45, Issue 4, Spring 2021, p. 170.
[903] *Ibid*, pp. 170-171.
[904] See for example: L. Yordi, *Colombia elections 2022: An uncertain political future for the former FARC guerilla*, London School of Economics, March 2022, https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/latamcaribbean/2022/03/15/colombia-elections-uncertain-future-farc/.
[905] K. Cragin and B. Hoffman, p. 5.
[906] Ibid, p.11.
[907] J. C. Mejía Azuero *et al*., *Ammunition in Colombia: General Regulatory Aspects, Administración & Desarrollo*, Vol. 50, No. 1, June 2020, p.85, https://doi.org/10.22431/25005227.vol50n1.4.
[908] K. Cragin and B. Hoffman, p.*xx*.
[909] Defence Intelligence Assessment (1999), p. 6.

For example, its notorious 'bunker buster' bomb consisted of a propane cylinder which acted as an exploding projectile.[910] Meanwhile, more rudimentary devices were constructed using a combination of precursors and fertiliser, in some cases incorporating Claymore-style nails, nuts and bolts.[911] By 2014, these devices featured in seventy five percent of attacks on Colombian military personnel.[912] At least part of this bomb-making knowledge was drawn from the experience of wider organisations around the world, including the Irish Provisional Republican Army (PIRA), who had extensive experience in the use of explosives.[913]

The FARC's armed and infiltrative activities consistently drew on intelligence systems and capabilities, primarily delivered through a decentralised network of human sources and militiamen. These provided time-sensitive tactical-level information, including with respect to troop movements and potential targets.[914] This access was put to effective use in the lead-up to the groups' assault on the Las Delicias military base in 1996 as well as the siege at Mitu and the battle of El Billar in 1998. During these events, intelligence-gathering and prestrike reconnaissance activity acted as a prelude to the application of indirect fires and manoeuvre.[915] Whilst the FARC's remote and frequent change of encampments, combined with harsh punishments for informants, provided for effective counter-intelligence, the group was not impervious to infiltration, particularly when Colombian military intelligence improved from the 2010s onwards. Illustrative of this development was the killing of top leader Alfonso Cano in November 2011 following an ambitious intelligence operation that involved placing infiltrated agents deep into FARC-controlled territory, alongside the use of signals intelligence feeds.[916]

Communication and propaganda

The FARC's communication and propaganda strategy, whilst evolving over time, remained reasonably traditional with respect to both its content and means of propagation. The group targeted its propaganda efforts at two separate audiences. Firstly, and as briefly alluded to, it developed content that was geared towards the indoctrination of members and recruits, the latter of whom were obliged to read materials such as the group's accepted political theories for around two hours a day.[917] A heavy emphasis was placed on collective identity, with members discouraged to use the first person when communicating.[918] The group's internal narratives, whilst drawing on core Marxist tenets, also sought to stoke animosity towards various social groups and cleavages ranging from the political elite and Colombian military to the clergy as a means of constructing an 'us versus them' paradigm and further legitimising its armed campaign.[919] The second intended audience for the FARC's propaganda efforts

[910] T. J. Sacquety, *Forty Years of Insurgency: Colombia's Main Opposition Groups*, Veritas, Vol. 2, No. 4, 2006, https://arsof-history.org/articles/v2n4_40years_insurgency_page_1.html.
[911] *US Military Helps Colombia Fight IED Threat*, US Southern Command News Release, US Department of Defence, June 10, 2014, https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/602850/us-military-helps-colombia-fight-ied-threat/.
[912] Ibid.
[913] J. McDermott and C.C. Aaron, FARC Gives Notice of an Urban Campaign, Janes Intelligence Review, Vol. 14, Issue 9, September 2022, pp. 24-25.
[914] See for example: J. A. Gentry and D. E. Spencer, *Colombia's FARC: A Portrait of Insurgent Intelligence, Intelligence and National Security*, Vol. 25, Issue 4, December 2010, pp.453-478.
[915] Defence Intelligence Assessment (1999), pp. 3-6.
[916] See *'The downfall of FARC leader Alfonso Cano'*, Strategic Comments, Vol. 17, Issue 9, December 2011, pp.1-4; and *Tecnología, inteligencia, mil hombres y gente de las FARC acabaron con 'Alfonso Cano'*, RTVE, November 05, 2011, https://www.rtve.es/noticias/20111105/santos-confirma-gente-farc-ayudo-a-acabar-con-alfonso-cano/473499.shtml.
[917] P.S Nader, *Former Members' Perspective are Key to Impacting the FARC*, Journal of Strategic Security, Vol. 6, No. 1, Spring 2013, p. 77.
[918] Ibid, p. 78.
[919] Ibid, pp. 78-79.

consisted of potential supporters within areas of (intended) territorial control. The group's leadership regularly employed a combination of speeches and press communiqués in order to spread its discourse and promote its cause and ideals to prospective sympathisers.[920] Moreover, it leveraged a combination of short-wave radio broadcasts and popular mediums such as music in order to increase the appeal of its messages, even dabbling in *música fariana*, or 'FARC music'.[921] Similarly, intercepted emails linked to the FARC's senior leadership in 2000 revealed plans to create a dedicated album that would cost around US $150,000 and feature musicians from the Dominican Republic – a regional centre for music production – as well as songs containing catchy lyrics such as "Taca taca taca, the government will fall" (top leader Manuel Marulanda himself was said to be behind the idea).[922]

At the same time, interviews with former combatants highlight the extent to which the FARC's presence and visibility in held areas as well as its provision of core public functions such as dispute resolution, which contrasted with the absence of formal state governance, was the largest contributor to its appeal and credibility (in effect conveying an 'actions speak louder than words' logic).[923] Admittedly, the FARC did experiment with more modern forms of communication and propaganda, albeit at a late stage. It created its own online news outlet – initially called the *Insurgent Bulletin* (*el Informativo Insurgente*) and subsequently renamed *New Colombia News* (*Nueva Colombia Noticias*) – within the context of the Havana peace talks, producing digital content in a format that emulated Colombian news broadcasts with a view to legitimise its demands and extend the reach of its public relations campaign to the wider public.[924] News bulletins highlighting government double standards and the validity of the group's grievances and political cause were also posted on YouTube and distributed via social media accounts.[925] Ultimately however, the FARC's relatively late entrance onto the digital scene meant that its efforts in this space palled in comparison with the government's well-oiled strategic communications machine. The group's leadership thus conceded in the early stages of the Havana process that "that politically and propagandistically they hit us really hard."[926]

Crime and narco-trafficking

The FARC's entry and deepening involvement in the regional narcotics trade was, as we have seen, a controversial feature of the insurgency's evolution. In the mid-1990s, the fragmentation of Colombia's major trafficking cartels – who had tended to purchase their coca from Bolivia and Peru – opened up the field for new entrants and fuelled agricultural production of the plant in Colombia. Indeed, in 1997 the country became the largest coca-producing nation.[927] In turn, coca's profitability and ease of transport encouraged agricultural migrants to travel to production areas, catalysing rural population growth.[928] Thus, the FARC's leadership begrudgingly turned to the cocaine trade as a logical means of sustaining its campaign by

[920] See for example: A. Blanco *et al*., p. 444.
[921] R.C. Quishpe, *Corcheas insurgents: usos y funciones de la música de las FARC-EP durante el conflict armado en Colombia***,** Universidad de los Andes, April 2018, pp. 1-59.
[922] R. Carroll, *Guerrillas in the mix,* The Guardian, February 25, 2010, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/feb/25/farc-colombia-pop-record-recruitment.
[923] P.S Nader, pp. 82-83.
[924] A. L. Fattal, *Uploading the News After Coming Down the Mountain: The FARC's Experiment with Online Television in Cuba, 2012-2016*, International Journal of Communication, Vol. 11, 2017, p.3838.
[925] Ibid, p. 3833.
[926] Ibid, p. 3839.
[927] *Coca Cultivation and Eradication*, Colombia Peace, March 28, 2020, https://colombiapeace.org/coca-cultivation-and-eradication/.
[928] See also: *M. L.* Dion, Michelle and C. Russler, *Eradication Efforts, the State, Displacement and Poverty: Explaining Coca Cultivation in Colombia during Plan Colombia*, Journal of Latin American Studies, Vol. 40, No. 3, August 2008, pp. 399–421.

levying tax on producers, laboratories and drug shipments in exchange for protection.[929] The group's defence of producers sometimes took on highly visible forms, such as when it shot down two aerial spraying, 'crop-duster' aircraft in 2013, resulting in a temporary suspension in (highly toxic) arial eradication via fumigation.[930] Beyond economic interests, some observers have argued that the group's involvement in the drug economy also stemmed from political motivations, including as an enabler for governance activities and as a means of supporting peasant smallholders.[931] Arguably, income derived from the trade also reduced the FARC's appetite to negotiate on serious terms with the government in the late 1990s and early 2000s, not least because it did not need to make concessions on the grounds of financial difficulty.[932]

Despite these arguments, the FARC's narcotics-related activities increasingly resembled those of a fully-fledged professional trafficking organisation. Protection taxes gradually gave way to more active control of coca plantations, which extended into Peru's northern borderlands. In the late 1990s, the FARC's leadership ordered the group to become the exclusive buyer of raw cocaine paste in occupied territories, with the latter eventually controlling as much as 70 percent of narcotics production in Colombia.[933] It further mandated that part of this cocaine paste be exchanged for weapons in a dynamic often referred to in the insurgency literature as a 'drug for weapons' economy.[934] The group also established cross-border smuggling and facilitation networks, working with the Mexican Tijuana, Gulf, and Sinaloa Cartels as well as corrupt border-security personnel (including elements of Venezuela's National Guard), importing precursor chemicals into Colombia and, according to some reports, infiltrating maritime ports and airports.[935] In addition, Colombian intelligence personnel reported FARC attempts at establishing contacts in European importation hubs such as Amsterdam and Brussels under the guise of the *Bolivarian Continental Coordination Body (Coordinadora Continental Bolivariana)*.[936] Meanwhile, the FARC's own cocaine-processing activities expanded to include the oversight of high-capacity and high-purity laboratories located as far as Bolivia's Cochabamba province.[937] Ultimately, Colombian official analyses concluded that by the early 2010s, as many as eight FARC *fronts* had largely abandoned their guerilla activities in favour of narco-trafficking.[938]

The FARC's criminal activities did not stop there. The group integrated kidnappings-for-ransom within its *modus operandi*, claiming that these targeted corrupt politicians and officials.[939] High-profile acts included the capture and murder of former culture minister Consuelo Araujonoguera in 2001, the kidnapping of presidential candidate Ingrid Betancourt in 2002 (who had advocated for negotiation) and the abduction of Colombian National Police

[929] R. Vargas Meza, *The FARC the War and the Crisis of the State*, North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA)September 25, 2007, https://nacla.org/article/farc-war-and-crisis-state.
[930] C. Kraul, *Anti-coca spraying halted in Colombia after 2 U.S. pilots shot down,* Los Angeles Times, December 16, 2013.
[931] J. Gutiérrez and F. Thomson*, Rebels-Turned-Narcos? The FARC-EP's Political Involvement in Colombia's Cocaine Economy,* Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, Vol. 44, Issue 1, June 2020, pp. 26-51.
[932] J. Otis, p. 2.
[933] *Las FARC se Fortalecen como Cartel del Narcotráfico, Revela Informe de la Policía*, Caracol Radio, Febuary 18, 2010.
[934] Ibid. See also: *Drug Trafficking: The Role of Insurgents, Terrorists, and Sovereign States*, Unites States Directorate of Intelligence, Copy 365, November 1982 (Declassified January 2011), pp.1-13.
[935] S. Logan and A. Morse, pp. 12-15.
[936] *ARC Preparan Campamento Bolivariano en Europa: lo estaría Organizado Rodrigo Granda*, El Tiempo, January 31, 2010.
[937] R. Graham, p. 1.
[938] These were the 15th *front*, 29th *front*, 30th *fron*t, 33rd *front*, 48th *front,* 57th *Front,* 60th *front* and 63rd *front*. See International Crisis Group Report (2010), p. 8.
[939] R. Vargas Meza, p. 1.

then-Colonel Luis Herlindo Mendieta in 2008.[940] The FARC nevertheless announced that it would give up the practice in 2012 in order to meet a precondition set by the government in the lead-up to peace talks (along with the release of hostages).[941] In the 1990s, the group also ventured into illegal gold mining, securing a presence amongst the mining communities of Bajo Cauca and North Eastern Antioquia.[942] This activity was continued by dissident FARC elements and other armed groups following the 2016 peace deal, with cross-border smuggling activities reportedly sanctioned by elements of Venezuela's Maduro regime.[943]

Transport and logistics

Despite evolving over time, the FARC's transport and logistics systems remained relatively simple in comparison to other contemporary clandestine movements – a possible reflection of both its long rural history and grassroots character. Even then, it did establish cross-border transport and smuggling solutions and routes, both within the context of its criminal activities and for the purposes of acquiring weapons and other offensive capabilities. The group developed its own network of roads and bridges in borderland areas, which benefited from cover provided by dense forests along the Peruvian, Ecuadorian and Panamanian borders, whilst also exploiting swamps and rivers bordering Venezuela and Brazil.[944] Again, transport infrastructure provided the dual benefit of contributing to shadow governance ambitions, whilst at the same time providing a trafficking and logistics function. Illustratively, the group instructed drivers and bribed Ecuadorian soldiers and policemen to smuggle propane cannisters – used to manufacture mortar rounds – as well as medical supplies, fuel and even Russian-made PRG 7V anti-tank rockets into Colombia.[945] Panama's Darien region, meanwhile, provided a hub for arms, ammunition and detonators acquired from criminal groups (possibly with the complicity of corrupt elements of the National Army), which were subsequently transported by the group's 57th *front* to Colombia, further supplementing FARC weapons caches.[946]

The group employed creative smuggling solutions as part of its maritime trafficking operations, perhaps best illustrated by its use of so-called 'narco-submarines' aimed at reducing the risk of interdiction. Rudimentary at first, these semi-submersible vessels evolved in both range – up to 2,000 nautical miles – and sophistication from around 2005 onwards, adopting aerodynamic and double-hulled designs, multiple fuel tanks and advanced telecommunication equipment, anti-radar and Global Positioning System (GPS) technology.[947] The vessels would typically rendezvous with smaller go-fast boats which, following the transhipment of drug

[940] *Guerra total de las FARC, un capitulo de horror en el conflicto armado*, El Tiempo, September 26, 2016, https://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/CMS-16712059.
[941] *FARC Renounces Kidnapping*, Advocacy for Human Rights in the Americas, February 28, 2012, https://www.wola.org/analysis/farc-renounces-kidnapping/.
[942] *Due Diligence in Colombia's Gold Supply Chain: Gold Mining in Antioquia*, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2016, p. 9.
[943] R. C. Berg et al., *A Closer Look at Colombia's Illegal, Artisanal, and Small-Scale Mining*, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), December 20, 2021, https://www.csis.org/analysis/closer-look-colombias-illegal-artisanal-and-small-scale-mining.
[944] K. Cragin and B. Hoffman, p.1 0
[945] See S. Logan and A. Morse, p. 9; and R. Florey, *Colombia military seizes anti-aircraft rockets 'meant for FARC'*, Colombia Reports, February 4, 2015, https://colombiareports.com/colombia-military-seizes-anti-aircraft-rockets-meant-farc/amp/.
[946] See *FARC Associate Pleads Guilty in Manhattan Federal Court to Providing Material Support to a Foreign Terrorist Organisation*, US Attorney's Office, Southern District of New York, (212) 637-2600, August 10, 2010, https://archives.fbi.gov/archives/newyork/press-releases/2010/nyfo081010.htm; and A. Alsema, *Military Intelligence Shed Light on Colombia's Illegal Arms Import*s, Colombia Reports, November 1, 2023, https://colombiareports.com/military-intelligence-sheds-light-on-colombias-illegal-arms-imports/.
[947] M. J. Jaramillo, *The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the Development of Narco-Submarines*, Journal of Strategic Security, Vol. 9, No. 1, Spring 2016, p. 54.

loads, would carry these consignments to discreet coastal disembarkation points for onward distribution. The US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and Colombian National Police concluded that the FARC employed graduate engineers as part of its submarine development programme, whilst also drawing on the expertise of Sri Lankan, Russian and Pakistani naval engineers.[948] In an interesting business spin-off venture, the FARC was reported to have sold and/or rented part of its semi-submersible capability, the construction of which required bespoke factory sites hidden under jungle canopy and skills as diverse as steel welding, electrical circuit-laying and fiberglass work as well as knowledge of propulsion systems, to other trafficking groups – the latter of whom may also have contributed to capability development costs.[949]

Once again, relationships with both state actors and other clandestine groups proved instrumental in establishing a regional logistics footprint, contributing to power projection and influence. For example, the FARC courted Brazilian trafficker Luiz Fernando da Costa (aka Fernandinho Beira-Mar) as a means of accessing wider distribution networks by leveraging his contacts in Paraguay.[950] It also reportedly worked with the Paraguayan Popular Army (EPP) guerilla movement to establish a logistics presence in the Triple Frontier region connecting Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay.[951] Meanwhile, emails attributed to FARC leader Raúl Reyes revealed that the group was introduced to Australian arms dealers with access to surface-to-air missile parts by Hugo Chavez.[952] Venezuela also reportedly provided elements of the FARC with Venezuelan passports for the purpose of travelling to Germany.[953] Colombian intelligence officials, furthermore, highlighted that the group's attempts at establishing business and distribution contacts extended across the Atlantic, including to Brussels, Amsterdam and Paris.[954]

Finance and money laundering

Like many other clandestine organisations, financial income became a key contributor to the FARC's longevity – a means through which to recruit members and retain its combat strength. However, and as highlighted throughout this chapter, financial profit arguably became an end in itself, distorting the group's original aims and introducing complex political economy dynamics.[955] Indeed, Colombian estimates placed the organisation's annual revenue for 1998 at around US $285 million,[956] with some estimations suggesting that this may have risen to as much as US $600 million in the early 2000s.[957] The FARC leadership's decision to participate in the drug trade initially consisted of a ten percent protection tax levied on coca cultivators and smugglers, paving the way for more direct involvement via processing activities that

[948] A. M. Saavedra, *La tecnologia de los submarinos al servicio del narcotráfico*, El Pais, March 6, 2011, https://www.elpais.com.co/judicial/la-tecnologia-de-los-submarinos-al-servicio-del-narcotrafico.html. See also: G. A. Ackerman, *Comparative Analysis of VNSA Complex Engineering Efforts*, Journal of Strategic Security, Vol. 9, No. 1, Spring 2016, p. 125.
[949] K. Semple, *The Submarine Next Door*, The New York Times Magazine, December 3, 2000, https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/library/magazine/home/20001203mag-semple.html?scp=13&sq=ismael%2520serrano&st=cse; and M. J. Jaramillo, p.58.
[950] J. P. Forero, *Globalization and the FARC*, United States Army War College Report, March 2013, pp. 19-20.
[951] Ibid.
[952] J. Glüsing, p. 1.
[953] Ibid.
[954] ICG (2010), p. 6.
[955] See for example: A. Rettberg *et al*., *Different Resources, Different Conflicts? The Subnational Political Economy of Armed Conflict and Crime in Colombia*, Bogotá: Universidad de los Andes, Colombia, 2020, pp. 3-44.
[956] R. Ortiz, I*nsurgent Strategies in the Post-Cold War: The Case of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia*, Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, Vol. 25, Issue 2, January 2011, p. 129.
[957] K. Cragin and B. Hoffman, p. 5.

produced higher financial yields. Taxes also extended beyond the coca trade to include marijuana and poppy growers and were, as we have seen, further bolstered by income from kidnap-for-ransom and illegal mining activities.[958] These sources of income were also likely supplemented by donations from state backers. For example, emails attributed to the FARC's leadership revealed how Hugo Chávez offered the FARC up to US $300m alongside oil rations that could subsequently be sold for profit.[959] In turn, observers have recurrently pointed to the extent to which systemised access to and control over illicit revenue streams contributed to the organisation's status as one of the world's wealthiest insurgencies.[960]

Organisationally, many of the key decisions relating to the group's financial operations were taken by its Financial Commission, which was established following the FARC's Seventh Guerilla Conference in 1982 (during which the group elected to turn to the coca trade for revenue).[961] Subsequently, Olidem Romel Solarte Cerón (Aka 'Oliver'), Chief Financial Officer of the 48th *Front*, appeared to have played a significant role in establishing new financial relations and cross-border trafficking partnerships, including with Ecuadorian and Mexican wholesale cocaine distributors, before his death in 2011.[962] The group also harnessed a range of money laundering, investment and financial transfer schemes. Already in the 1970s, it exploited a foreign exchange system introduced by the Colombian Government known as '*ventanilla siniestra*' (or left-hand window), which allowed various actors – including the FARC – to inject US dollars into mainstream financial institutions as well as effectively sell dollars to the Government.[963]

After the closure of the system in 1991, narcotics traffickers, including FARC partners, turned to the Black-Market Peso Exchange (BMPE), in which narco-representatives sold US dollars – such as those generated by drug sales in the US – to peso brokers at discounted rates. Rather than smuggling cash to Colombia, the dollars were placed in a bank account in the US and subsequently used by brokers to buy various trade export goods (such as machinery, electronics and so on) purchased by Colombian businesses.[964] It is also likely that, in a similar vein to wider trafficking organisations in Latin America, the FARC leveraged the region's network of '*casas de cambios*' (exchange houses) benefiting from correspondent banking arrangements with foreign banks. For example, in 2008, the US Treasury designated one such Bogota-headquartered exchange house, Mercurio Internacional S.A, for providing money laundering services to the FARC's 27th *front*. According to the designation, the exchange house worked with a number of other similar entities to obscure foreign currency exchange activities and avoid financial detection by regulators.[965]

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[958] J C. A. Youngers and E Rosin*, Drugs and Democracy in Latin America,* Boulder (CO): Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005, p. 103.
[959] *The Farc files: Just how much help has Hugo Chávez given to Colombia's guerillas?* The Economist, May 22, 2008, https://www.economist.com/the-americas/2008/05/22/the-farc-files.
[960] See for example A. R. Suárez, *Parasites and Predators: Guerrillas and the Insurrection Economy of Colombia*, Journal of International Affairs, Vol. 53, No. 2, Spring 2000, pp. 577-601.
[961] T. R. Cook, *The Financial Arm of the FARC: A Threat Finance Perspective*, Journal of Strategic Security, Vol.1, No.4, Spring 2011, p.22
[962] *Solarte era el contacto con narcos mexicanos*, El Universo, March 17, 2011, https://www.eluniverso.com/2011/03/17/1/1355/solarte-era-contacto-narcos-mexicanos.html/.
[963] See A. L. Atehortúa Cruz and D. M. Rojas Rivera, *El narcotráfico en Colombia. Pioneros y capos*, Historia y Espacio, Vol. 4, No. 31, January 2008, p. 7.
[964] T. R. Cook, p. 30.
[965] *Treasury Targets FARC money Exchange House*, US Treasury Press Release, May 7, 2008, https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/hp966.

8.5 Bringing it together:

As this chapter has shown, the academic value of examining the FARC lies partly in the organisation's unusual longevity (by guerilla group standards) and partly in its hybrid, political-criminal character. Born within the wider geostrategic context of the Cold War and proliferation of Marxist insurgencies, the organisation had to navigate change, both within Colombian politics and the wider region, when the collapse of the Soviet Union gave way to globalisation, market economics and social change. The FARC was perhaps always going to evolve and morph, if only to survive. What is perhaps most striking is the way in which it did so. On the one hand, it attempted to retain its ideological appeal amongst elements of the population that remained largely in the margins of this systemic change. This also extended to state patrons, as seen in the context of its relations with Venezuela's Hugo Chávez. On the other, it not only adapted to but also leveraged globalisation, including transnational narcotics supply chains, as part of its operating model. That it was able to maintain these concurrent, and to a significant extent, competing lines of effort is striking. Perhaps inevitably however, this approach also shifted internal incentive structures from the collective to the individual, with *front* commanders arguably taking on the mantel of local quasi-drug kingpins – a dynamic which, as Thomas A. Marks notes, meant that the group's ways and means gradually subsumed its aims.[966] Confronted with the reality that it could not realistically succeed in its armed campaign as well as dwindling popular support, the organisation's leadership had little choice but to pursue the route of political dialogue and demobilisation, even if small dissident – and largely criminal – elements refused to lay down their arms.

In turn, the case study is directly relevant to this thesis' core research question in a number of aspects. Firstly, it provides yet another example of how clandestine non-state actors can act as agents of political change. Indeed, at its pinnacle the group came close to supplanting the state in key localities within its 'home' territories, while inflicting military losses on government forces. The case study therefore also supports the notion introduced in Chapter 2 that non-state actors are capable of both wielding significant power and of 'chipping away' at the state's natural defences. Meanwhile, the FARC's approach to decision and strategy-making, including through conferences and internal resolutions, reveals an advanced policy apparatus (hypothesis 1) tied to accompanying organisational implementation mechanisms as well as external partnerships. Although the FARC in its early years maintained a relatively hierarchical structure, it was compelled to devolve some executive powers to lower-order formations, including *fronts*, as an antidote against disruption (a dynamic that lies at the heart of this thesis' second hypothesis). Of course, this same delegation of power also arguably undermined some of the group's cohesion as a unified political force, particularly when local commanders began to pursue their own localised economic interests. Finally, and of direct relevance to this thesis' third hypothesis is the range of levers adopted by the group over the years, to include advanced capabilities such as narco-submarines and light aircraft in addition to its soldiers. As such, the organisation came close to conceptually resembling a 'state within a state' with its own land, sea and air forces. It is in turn possible that this may offer a template for future clandestine organisations seeking to establish similar multi-domain capabilities in the age of the drone (in Yemen for example).[967] Finally, the FARC's hybrid, narco-insurgent character reintroduces some of the definitional challenges introduced in Chapter 1, underscoring how clandestine organisations may evolve in ways that do not fit neatly within rigid typologies. In this respect, the thesis' framework was shown to provide a more effective and agile means of mapping groups whose policies, strategies and levers of power extend across traditional definitional boundaries.

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[966] See T. A. Marks, *FARC, 1982-2002: criminal foundation for insurgent defeat*, in T. A. Marks and P. B. Rich (eds), *People's War: Variants and Responses (1st Edition)*, London: Routledge, 2017.

[967] These have been used within the maritime, air and land domains by Ukrainian forces, introducing the potential for the capability to migrate to non-state actors.

Part IV: Conclusion

CHAPTER 9 – Clandestine non-state actors in the international system

"Insufficient thought has been given to defining the necessary and sufficient conditions for saying that an international system exists." Barry Buzan and Richard Little [968]

Critiques of International Relations theory – and even of the wider study of international politics – continue to highlight the extent to which these fields remain centred around state actors as well as the Westphalian assumption that states 'contain' society and that political authority is defined by state borders.[969] States, according to prevailing thinking, are the actors who decide to go to war, enter into international political agreements and establish trade barriers.[970] This *de facto* focus has become the fundamental, almost uncontested axiom of International Relations, shaped by classical and Neorealist thinking.[971] Whilst a few courageous scholars have argued for greater recognition of non-state actors, including the wider cast list of multinational corporations, non-governmental organisations and even credit rating agencies, as agents of international influence, these have often struggled to challenge what Farida Lakhany aptly describes as the "inviolable position [of nation states] as sole actors on the world stage."[972] Scholarly attempts to examine the growing significance of armed, criminal and subversive non-state actor groups in the international order are no exception, lingering in the seldom-frequented and dimly lit corridors of the academic literature and entangled in definitional and conceptual quagmires. Indeed, and as Paul Staniland notes, "political science lacks a conceptual language to describe varying political orders."[973]

Lying against this backdrop, this thesis has sought to go beyond the purely theoretical debate in order to close three gaps within the existing evidence base. Firstly, the thesis attempted to break down definitional boundaries, including by looking at clandestine non-state actor characteristics manifested by different types of groups in varying political and geographic contexts. This focus was reflected in the selection of granular case studies, which spanned across criminal, terrorist and insurgent organisations operating in three different continents. Secondly, and partly as an additional means of achieving this, the thesis proposed a new analytical framework allowing for the comparative as well as systematic analysis of these same actors. Finally, and drawing on empirical evidence, the thesis introduced the notion of a parallel, non-state 'shadow order' connecting actors of different denominations in an increasingly connected, alternative international system, albeit one that often intersected with the formal state-based system.

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[968] B. Buzan and R. Little, *The Idea of 'International System': Theory Meets History*, International Political Science Review / Revue Internationale De Science Politique, Vol. 15, No. 3, 1994, pp. 231–255 (p.231).
[969] H. Lacher, *Putting the State in Its Place: The Critique of State-Centrism and Its Limits*, Review of International Studies, vol. 29, no. 4, October 2003, pp. 521–541.
[970] See for example C. Reus-Smit and D. Snidal (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008.
[971] Critical, here (and as explored in Chapter 2), were contributions such as Hans Morgenthau's emphasis on the role of 'national interest', Kenneth Waltz's account of sovereign state interactions within a Hobbesian-type anarchic international system and Hedley Bull's description of a state-based 'international society' adhering to agreed rules and interacting on the basis of common strategic interests. See H. J. Morgenthau, Politics *Among Nations*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1954. H. Milner, *The Assumption of Anarchy in International Relations Theory: A Critique*, Review of International Studies, Vol. 17, No. 1, 1991, pp. 67–85. A. Watson, *Hedley Bull, States Systems and International Societies*, Review of International Studies, Vol. 13, No. 2, April 1987, pp. 147–153. and R. Jervis, *Realism in the Study of World Politics*, International Organization, Vol. 52, No. 4, 1998, pp. 971–991.
[972] F. Lakhany, *How Important Are Non-State Actors*, *Pakistan Horizon*, vol. 59, no. 3, 2006, pp. 37-46 (37). See also I. Abraham and W. van Schendel, *The Making of Illicitness*, in Abraham and W. van Schendel (eds.), *Illicit Flows and Criminal Things: States, Borders, and the Other Side of Globalization*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005, p.5.
[973] P. Staniland, *States, Insurgents, and Wartime Political Orders*, Perspectives on Politics, Vol. 10, No. 02, June 2012, pp. 243.

It has done so by isolating some of the most salient features and characteristics of different clandestine non-state actors in order to explore, in line with the research question, whether these protagonists demonstrated the ability to project power across geographies, pursue individual interests and, ultimately, challenge both the (sovereign) state and the prevailing Neorealist ontology of the international stage. The analytical framework introduced as part of this research was once again central to this investigation, whilst arguably constituting an analytical output in its own right – a tool that could be applied by investigators and intelligence practitioners seeking to better understand the inner workings of such organisations. Admittedly, all frameworks and analytical models have their flaws and limitations. The thesis' framework is not, for example, predictive and, therefore, its application to any given case study may not necessarily help to anticipate *how* investigated actors are likely to respond to, say, state-led pressure beyond relatively well-established patterns such as their propensity to turn to asymmetric activities and/or adopt more decentralised operating structures. Moreover, and although informed by a reasonably large body of empirical data, the framework was only applied in a more granular way to a much smaller case study sample. Still, its application does shed light on traits and patterns that are observable across disparate strategic contexts. It is the task of this chapter to distill these crosscutting insights and assess the extent to which they support the thesis' original hypotheses.

9.1 Relating the case study findings to the original research question and hypotheses

Overall, the analysis of case studies revealed the fundamental propensity for clandestine non-state actors to project power, including across state borders. Al Qaeda (AQ), the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) and the 'Ndrangheta each demonstrated a tendency to seek out and establish power bases akin to fiefdoms or bastions of influence, which could in turn be leveraged to expand that same influence in new territories further afield. In doing so, these groups have indeed, albeit to varying degrees, challenged the sovereignty and 'rules' of states, either by establishing parallel governance and economic systems or by undermining states' monopoly over the use of force. As this thesis has demonstrated, this characteristic – which sits at the heart of the research question – is broadly supported by the literature (chapters three to five) and empirical case study analysis (chapters six to eight). However, unpacking the specificity of this dynamic is best achieved by returning to the thesis' core hypotheses, which offer a qualitatively measurable means of deconstructing the research question on the basis of the comparative analysis.

Hypothesis 1: There is an established body of evidence highlighting the extent to which CNSAs of various denominations display the characteristics of *political* actors. However, the agency of CNSAs extends to articulating and balancing complex policy choices, carving out (local) spheres of influence and securing multi-vector partnerships.

On balance, the investigation supports this hypothesis. All three of case studies developed highly political objectives. For al Qaeda 'core' and the FARC, these revolved around catalysing regime change, even if al Qaeda's ambition for a unified, supra-national 'Ummah' and the overthrow of Western-backed regimes across the Islamic world extended well beyond those of the Colombian guerrilla group. Meanwhile, the 'Ndrangheta's political objectives have long been geared towards securing shadow political systems in Calabria as an antidote to the region's perceived neglect by the state. Demonstrating a logic approaching that of traditional statecraft, all three groups emphasised the control of territory and economic resources ranging from oil fields and coca plantations to transportation hubs as the basis for alternative governance – a doctrine which, in the case of the FARC, was steeped in Marxist ideology. In a similar vein, all three protagonists saw value in exploiting governance vacuums and/or pockets of instability as a means of establishing strategic footholds in new territories, as illustrated by al Qaeda's presence in Yemen and Afghanistan or that of the FARC in southern

and eastern Colombia. The latter organisation also emphasised infrastructure projects such as the construction of roads and bridges as a means of asserting its presence, securing the support the local population and increasing its mobility. Moreover, al Qaeda viewed such bridgeheads as a step towards catalysing localised revolutions which, together, would feed into a larger transnational campaign of political change.[974] Meanwhile, the case of the 'Ndrangheta, an organisation with a subtler approach to political infiltration, reveals how clandestine non-state actors are capable of breeching more stable and economically developed territory – in this instance illustrated by its *'ndrina* (or clan) presence in, *inter alia*, northern Italy, the low countries, Germany and Canada.

Strategic partnerships featured heavily in each of the organisations' expansionist policies. Thus, al Qaeda's entire strategy gravitated around establishing local franchises and cells as the basis for a transnational web of political access and power. It also adopted a quasi-diplomatic, inter-group mediation and dispute resolution role, establishing reconciliation councils and appointing scholars and tribal sheikhs to arbitrate 'practical truces' (as its leadership called them) in the event of disagreements between various factions.[975] Both the FARC and the 'Ndrangheta similarly developed external criminal partnerships, with the latter's inter-organisational deal-making activities ranging from negotiating European wholesale market distribution shares with Albanian criminal groups to striking bargains with Latin American cartels. The case of the FARC perhaps most vividly reflects the extent to which clandestine non-actors may also engage directly with state actors. Not only did it receive training and weapons from the Soviet bloc and communist countries during its Cold War years; it also subsequently enjoyed close relations with state patrons such as Venezuela's Hugo Chavez. Even then, and in a similar vein to state actors, the organisations at times found themselves at odds with strategic competitors. Thus, al Qaeda struggled to exert control over ISIS, its most successful offshoot; the FARC was drawn into pitched battles with rival armed and paramilitary groups such as the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia; and the 'Ndrangheta demonstrated a propensity towards occasional inter-clan warfare.

The examined groups demonstrated significant agency within the context of formulating policy decisions ranging from their initial recourse to violence and/or criminality to (de)escalating the intensity of their respective campaigns. In the case of al Qaeda, this included the group's initial declaration of war against the United States, which preceded attacks against the latter's assets in Kenya and Yemen. The FARC's political and policy-making agency was reflected in its successive decisions, first to launch its guerilla warfare campaign, then to expand its revenue and power base through narco-trafficking and, finally, to engage in political dialogue. Similarly, 'Ndrangheta decisions spanned from expanding into new markets to targeting politicians as a show of force. Notably, all three organisations adopted a sequenced, or multi-phase, strategic logic. Both al Qaeda and the FARC's strategic thinking arguably displayed variations on Mao's Tse-Tung three phases of warfare. Here, an initial defensive campaign organised from remote localities was considered a necessary precedent to offensive operations, including via conventional warfare, and, ultimately, to the overthrow of the state. The 'Ndrangheta case study arguably offers an interesting criminal alternative to the three-phase logic, with initial, localised illicit economic activities acting as a prequel to securing larger swathes of territory and, finally, de-facto shadow-political control (albeit via the co-option, rather than overthrow, of existing institutions). At the same time, the fact that none of the groups progressed fully through these stages highlights the extent to which such organisations may be compelled to revise and adapt their strategic objectives and approach in light of their evolving situation.

[974] Further geographic nodes, typically also situated within fragile localities such as Pakistan's tribal areas, provided staging posts for campaign planning and training with these latter, supporting functions similarly introduced by the FARC within Colombian demilitarized zones.
[975] *Letter to Abu Bashir*, ODNI, declassified March 1, 2016, p. 3.

Hypothesis 2: The morphologies and organisational structures of CNSAs are both adaptive and shaped by similar considerations, including the need to mitigate threats (such as disruption by state actors) and a willingness to seize specific political and economic opportunities. At the same time, their structural design is also influenced by their ideology as well as strategic and political culture.

Although the investigation broadly supports this hypothesis, it also introduces the need for analytical nuance. To be sure, the aforementioned tendency of clandestine non-state actors to engage in flexible policymaking implies a corresponding emphasis on organisational and structural agility. This is evidenced by the al Qaeda case study, whose leadership deliberately opted for a devolved and cell-based operating model, partly as a means of increasing the organisation's structural resilience to disruption and targeting. The FARC's *front*-based structure (within which new *fronts* could be established at will) allowed both force concentration and territorial expansion. It also provided the group with a means of pursuing specific opportunities, with individual *fronts* taking on a more active role in narco-trafficking. Such a logic similarly lay at the heart of the 'Ndrangheta's highly devolved and replicable, albeit secretive and selective, clan-based structure, which provided an effective vehicle for entering new markets, whilst inoculating the organisation against the risk of infiltration. At the same time, the three organisations did not always readily embrace the idea of devolved decision-making. Illustratively, the FARC opted for a traditional vertical operating model which meant that senior leaders constituted somewhat of a bottleneck and organisational choke point. Admittedly, the relative agency of individual *front* commanders, particularly those with access to narco-revenue, did increase over time, leading to occasional tensions with the senior leadership. The 'Ndrangheta's leadership commission made various attempts to remind local *capos* of their place in the organisation, albeit with mixed results. Meanwhile, and despite al Qaeda's original emphasis on devolution, its leadership had to contend with the fact that disparate franchises were often more focussed on localised political objectives than the wider global cause.

As is the case with most organisation's reaching a certain size, the three groups also faced bureaucratic challenges, some of which undermined organisational agility. The FARC comprised a combination of a (political) Secretariate, Central High Command, regional *Blocs* and *fronts,* as well subordinate tactical formations. Al Qaeda's lighter-touch organisational design still featured an Majlis Al Shura command council, various committees with responsibility for specific policy areas and its web of franchises, each with its own individual sub-structures. Although structurally fluid, the 'Ndrangheta had to navigate relations between its executive commission and various clan blocks, including the relatively powerful *'mandamenti,* which comprised *Locali* and subordinate *'ndrine.* These challenges became more acute for the FARC and al Qaeda as they increased in size and influence. Meanwhile, the organisations' overall reliance on individual leaders and ability to absorb their loss was somewhat varied. The 'Ndgangheta, perhaps the most devolved of the groups, has proven relatively resilient to the loss of senior *capos*, largely because of the high level of autonomy enjoyed by individual *'ndrine*. In contrast, the removal of subsequent FARC leaders had a direct bearing on the group's overall cohesion, essentially catalysing power fragmentation and the rise of local commanders as *de facto* decision makers in their areas of responsibility. Similarly, al Qaeda never truly recovered from the loss of its leader, Osama bin Laden, which was further compounded ten years later by the killing of fellow idealogue and co-founder Aman Al Zawahiri.

Whilst the organisations, as we have seen, all demonstrated a willingness to engage in partnerships (see hypothesis 1) and exploit new political and/or economic opportunities, the ways in which they did so differed, partly reflecting their respective institutional and strategic cultures. Shaped by the experience of the Mujahideen, al Qaeda embraced a relatively inclusive model for pursuing new strategic opportunities and sought to attract fighters, supporters and affiliates from across the globe to its cause. The 'Ndrangheta was much

selective in its pursuit of both opportunities and partnerships, even if its willingness to engage and strike alliances with organisations outside of its insular network of clans reveals a degree of pragmatism. The FARC's early choices of objectives and partnerships were steeped in communist ideals, although this did not stop it from working with criminal enterprises across Latin America as it morphed into a narco-insurgency. Still, the organisations' narratives and, to an extent, recruitment and indoctrination processes, largely reflected their respective ideologies derived from Marxism, Wahabism and Catholic-inspired codes of honour. The FARC and al Qaeda proved themselves somewhat more accepting than the insular 'Ndrangheta when seeking to bolster their rank-and-file membership – a necessary precondition for attaining their respective objectives. Thus, al Qaeda accepted members from countries far and wide, whilst the FARC showed a propensity towards gender inclusivity in its recruitment strategy.

Hypothesis 3: CNSAs consistently apply a variation on the types of levers of power available to states, albeit at a smaller scale, including with respect to the conduct of warfare; the pursuit of economic and financial interests; and strategic communications.

Overall, the analysis supports this hypothesis. The three case studies show the propensity for clandestine non-state actors to engage in violence as a continuation of policy – to once again borrow from von Clausewitz – by other means. Out of the examined groups, the FARC came closest to acquiring the type of war fighting capabilities traditionally enjoyed by states. These included weapons from Cold-War era stockpiles such as assault rifles, rocket propelled grenade launchers and mortars, alongside the growing use of anti-personnel mines and improvised exploding devices built using a combination of ordnance shells and commercial-grade explosives. It also established structured training modules that included infantry skills, jungle warfare and specialization in advanced weapon systems.[976] Al Qaeda similarly placed a heavy emphasis on the training of operatives, including in clandestine missions, weapons handling and the use of explosives, even if its ability to build a credible and potent cadre of fighters decreased following the loss of its training camps in Afghanistan. As a predominantly criminal organisation, the 'Ndrangheta's own armed capabilities admittedly paled in comparison, although it did reveal the ability to carry out targeted assassinations. The three groups established at times-complex (counter)intelligence and security procedures, which included the 'Ndrangheta's use of encrypted communications and threats aimed at collaborators of justice, al Qaeda's courier network (which operated outside of the digital space) and the FARC's human intelligence and reconnaissance capabilities.

The organisations harnessed innovative economic as well as financial mechanisms, at times demonstrating some of the characteristics of the fiscal and trade instruments of states. Al Qaeda used disbursements to affiliates – funnelled through a web of charities and non-governmental organisations – as a strategic lever of influence; a means of projecting its influence in new territories. Meanwhile, the FARC and the 'Ndrangheta both introduced local taxation schemes in their respective strongholds. Moreover, and under the supervision of its Financial Commission, the FARC turned to advanced money laundering methods to disguise the profits of its narco-operations, including by harnessing Colombia's Black-Market Peso Exchange and Latin America's sprawling network of *casas de cambios*. Economic infiltration and embeddedness formed a cornerstone of the 'Ndrangheta's operating model, involving layers of complex commercial interests, assets and financial structures. Its money laundering operations also span(ed) across multiple jurisdictions and sectors: transport, cash rich hospitality businesses, construction and renewable energy. Reflecting a wider trend in the evolution of organised crime syndicates, it acquired the services of a legion of third-party white-collar professionals such as tax advisers, solicitors and notaries in structuring its financial affairs. All three organisations effectively managed to exploit global transport and

[976] As we have seen, the group even developed a maritime capability, including semi-submersibles, even if these were predominantly geared towards drug-running operations.

logistics solutions as part of their illicit operations. Whilst, in the case of the 'Ndrangheta and the FARC, these were closely tied to their financial activities, such as trans-Atlantic cocaine smuggling and/or investments in port infrastructure, al Qaeda went one step further by (literally) weaponizing modern air travel.

Perhaps the greatest point of divergence between the examined organisations arguably consisted of their approach to public relations and strategic communications. Here, al Qaeda can be placed in a league of its own. The group viewed communications and publicity as *the* critical means of inspiring followers, demoralising adversaries and spreading its ideology. To be sure, its communications strategy, which blended high-profile acts of terror designed to resonate with audiences and highly curated media content, set the bar and standards for subsequent terrorist organisations such as ISIS. The FARC's approach to strategic communications and propaganda was more traditional, often relying on leadership statements and short-wave radio broadcasts (which differed markedly from al Qaeda's use of satellite television channels). The guerrilla group endeavoured to expand its online presence in the context of political negotiations, but these efforts paled in comparison to those of the Colombian state, resulting in information asymmetry. The 'Ndrangheta contrasts heavily to the other case studies given its reluctance to propagandise and draw attention to its activities – a likely reflection of its predominantly criminal character. Even then, the organisation's leadership has, over the years, cultivated its image and reputation, including through its retention of traditional codes, rites and oaths, the latter of which have contributed to its mystique as well as to folkloric depictions in television series, films and novels.

9.2 The character of clandestine non-state actors in the international system

The above cases study dynamics and, indeed, this thesis' wider theoretical investigation, hint at macro-level implications for the study of clandestine non-state power in the international system. Amongst these, and perhaps most critically, is the aforementioned existence of an unexplored dimension – or, indeed, clandestine 'order' – existing both parallel to, and intersecting with, the state-based international system. It is one that theorists and state security institutions have often struggled to define through the lens of inherited norms and perceptions as well as established *Weltanschauungs*. Indeed, rather than being 'non-state' *per se*, the protagonists described in this thesis are typically viewed by policy makers as subservient, '*sub*-state' entities. However, and as we have seen, these actors have time again embedded themselves in the political fabric of the international system to the extent that one cannot arguably talk convincingly about international 'stability' without acknowledging their (both stabilising and destabilising) role within the global architecture. For this reason, patterns in the evolution of these actors may also act as a warning sign foretelling changes in the very structure of the international system – one in which the global order becomes predicated not only upon inter-state connections but also on different configurations of inter-non-state actor and state–non-state actor relations, amounting to an erosion of traditional notions of sovereignty and an almost postmodern challenge to the idea that 'rules' are defined and (re)written by states.

Such an assertion rests on the basic principle evidenced throughout this thesis that clandestine non-state actors are capable of establishing (hyper)localised forms of political influence and, indeed, 'sovereign' rule, through the calibrated projection of power: what the philosopher Bertrand Russell described as "the ability to produce intended effects."[977] They achieve this, typically, through a combination of infiltration, co-option and subversion – gradually taking over social habitats, colonising economic ecosystems and securing 'political neighbourhoods' in which (and, critically, *from* which) they can operate. As we have seen, variations of this logic can be observed through the writings of guerrilla and terrorist thinkers ranging from Mao Tse-tung to Osama Bin Laden, whilst Giovanni Falcone – the iconic anti-

[977] See F. H. Knight, *Bertrand Russell on Power*, Ethics, Vol. 49, No. 3, 1939, pp. 253–285.

mafia prosecutor – similarly described the logic of organised crime as "merely [that] of power."[978] Spheres of influence and pockets of power are therefore carved out using a range of approaches conceptually resembling those of traditional statecraft and governance, effectively amounting to quasi 'micro-states'; entities that fill gaps in the state's ability to provide for its citizens.[979]

To a degree, this logic also adheres to Anthony Giddens' notion of 'power systems' in which control over resources and production constitutes the necessary means to effect transformative change. [980] Thus, classical governance approaches that blend the provision of basic services, justice, security and employment with the extraction of taxes or rent, accompanied by coercive means such as surveillance and the threat of violence still provide the conduit towards establishing footholds in strategically important environments. Such dynamics, moreover, offer a variation on the basic Marxist and Weberian concepts of power and legitimacy as being derived respectively from the state's control over the means of production and monopoly over the use of force,[981] whilst approaching Michel Foucault's thinking on the pluralist nature and 'microphysics' of power which, by implication, cannot be the possession of the elite or exercised by a single political centre.[982] Moreover, the granular study of clandestine non-state actor organisational structures, bureaucracies and internal expertise, including those of the 'Ndrangheta, the FARC and al Qaeda, suggests that the concept of *professionalisation*, which the likes of Webber and Man considered a key attribute of the state, can also be extended to non-state entities.

Viewing these actors through such a lens offers a simpler framework through which to observe the character and logic of organisations which, it appears, harness instruments and levers that are (once again) conceptually similar to those developed by states in pursuit of their interests. It also follows that if clandestine groups can establish 'domestic' bastions of quasi-sovereign political power over which they exert *de facto* rule (and in which they can therefore develop policies on 'internal' affairs), then the more ambitious amongst these actors should also, at least in theory, be capable of pursuing 'external' foreign policy agendas. Arguably, this is precisely what a number of groups, including the 'Ndrangheta, the FARC, and al Qaeda have achieved, essentially replicating the workings of the international system at a parallel, albeit often intersecting, sub-state level. Thus, clandestine non-state actors also establish balances of power, enter in alliances, negotiate trade agreements and pursue security partnerships across at times redefined or alternative geographical boundaries and spheres of influence – the type of 'grand strategic', political manoeuvring and bargaining traditionally assumed to be solely within the purview of states. These actors also have the option of blending soft power with hard power in pursuit of their international – or to be consistent, 'external' – strategic aims.

Interactions *between* clandestine non-state actor groups are also not too dissimilar to those that exist between states. The decision to join non-state partnerships and alliances is, in many respects, born out of an almost game-theoretical logic that is calibrated around increasing their real or perceived influence through cooperation or shared interests. This pattern essentially

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[978] G. Falcone, *Cosas de la Cosa Nostra*, Barcelona, Ediciones Barataria, 2006, p. 68.

[979] Although the comparison is tempting, clandestine non-state power centres should be distinguished from historical precedents, such as the city-states of ancient Greece, to the extent that they either run parallel to or subsume state structures.

[980] See A. Giddens, *Power, the Dialectic of Control and Class Structuration*, in *Profiles and Critiques in Social Theory*, Contemporary Social Theory. Palgrave, London, 1982, pp. 197-214; and I. J. Cohen, *Structuration Theory: Anthony Giddens and the Constitution of Social Life*, London, Macmillan, 1989, pp. 149-162.

[981] See for example K. Dusza, *Max Weber's Conception of the State*, International Journal of Politics, *Culture, and Society*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1989, pp. 71–105.

[982] This idea partly flows from Foucault's argument that subjects are the passive objects of power, rather than consciously exercising it. See K. J. Heller, *Power, Subjectification and Resistance in Foucault*, SubStance, Vol. 25, No. 1, University of Wisconsin Press, 1996, pp. 78.

amounts to groups organising themselves into ideological or economic 'blocks' or, perhaps more accurately, into constellations of power. These affiliations and interactions bring the types of benefits that come with traditional alliances, such as lifting trade barriers, exchanging knowledge and agreeing on the division and control of territory and resources. They also typically involve agreeing on the 'rules of game', such as with respect to the price of commodities, sharing logistical platforms and so on. Here too, leaders or representatives take on an emissary role akin to that of trade envoys, brokering deals and scouting out new markets. Such cooperative arrangements can span from hyper-local agreements relating to territorial delineations (such as in the case of gangs operating in inner-city neighbourhoods) to transoceanic partnerships.

Meanwhile, all manner of groups – insurgent, terrorist, criminal and/or subversive – tend to frequent and interact in specific economic, trading and logistics hubs and 'hotspots': international centres of clandestine commerce that typically sit at the intersection of different spheres of influence. These of course form part of a much wider clandestine global financial system connecting not only these trading hubs but also most other clandestine operating localities via a large web of formal and informal financial institutions, remittance services and professional enablers. Moreover, just as in the case of state fiscal and stimulus policies, funds that are acquired through economic activities, including via 'external' trade with other groups, donations and/or taxation often underpin the delivery of flagship policies such as providing local grassroots services or acquiring new armed capabilities. Such funds can also be reinvested in growth-generating assets ranging from businesses to real estate, providing a means of diversifying within the licit economy. This approach, which in many ways resembles the notion of surplus sovereign wealth funds, is once again enabled by a plethora of financial and legal vehicles, including multi-layered offshore structures. Furthermore, cooperation between groups may of course extend to loans (a variation on 'sovereign' debt), even if clandestine organisations often have real incentives to avoid large-scale borrowing as well as to run their 'economies' efficiently and at profit; something they may arguably be better at than states.

A variation on the theme of cooperation consists of interactions and agreements between clandestine non-state actor groups and state actors, the latter of whom may be viewed by the former as useful 'force multipliers' when pursuing their aims.[983] Thus, whilst clandestine non-state actors working with states are usually described as 'proxies' of the latter, it could also be argued that this assumption ought to be turned on its head, with state backing instead being instrumentalised and exploited by non-state groups simply looking for 'foreign investment' from various governments. Perhaps for this reason, state alliances and support to clandestine non-state actor groups has historically been fraught with risk and unexpected consequences. Rarely content in the role of mere puppets, such groups have often felt emboldened to pursue their own agenda, spurred on by the injection of external resources. Moreover, clandestine actors continuously learn from states, with partnerships often resulting in the release and subsequent proliferation of expertise and capabilities previously 'owned' by states across the international non-state marketplace. Over time, and as this thesis has demonstrated, this pattern may lead to increased convergence between the means and methods available to state and non-state actors respectively.[984]

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[983] Bridget Coggins discusses the concept of "rebel diplomacy" in which armed actors "engage in strategic communication with foreign governments or agents, or with an occupying regime they deem foreign." See B. Coggins, *Rebel Diplomacy: Theorizing Violent Non-State Actors' Strategic Use of Talk*, In A. Arjona, N. Kasfir et al. (Eds), *Rebel Governance in Civil War*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015, p.107.

[984] Such alliances perhaps work best for state actors in those specific cases – such as that of the relationship between Iran and Hezbollah – where the strategic aims of both the state and non-state partner are relatively aligned and where the former is broadly content with the way in which its (perceived) proxy utilises the resources at its disposal. See for example A. Khan and H. Zhaoying,

Clearly however, and as we have also seen, the relations that exist both amongst clandestine actors and between these groups and states are also not always, to say the least, amicable. The act of carving out spheres of influences can trigger inter-group violence, particularly in contested areas claimed by different organisations, while even groups belonging to similar ideological denominations may clash over the control of territory or markets. Perhaps unsurprisingly, and in another parallel with state interactions, tensions, rivalries and hostilities tend to manifest themselves at times of structural change when existing inter-group and international non-state and state balances of power are altered, disrupted or re-negotiated. Critically, the shift towards a multipolar international system has opened new epicentres of contestation within which (clandestine) power can be projected. These theatres offer the vehicle through which to establish ideological or economic bridgeheads from which influence can then gradually be expanded. Similarly, the removal of previous, monopolistic and unipolar hegemons within (even localised) contexts can spark turf wars between new and old contestants as was the case following the dismantlement of some of the most dominant Colombian cartels – a structural shock that contributed to the rise of narco-violence in the region. [985]

Whilst the fundamental nature of clandestine actors may not have changed since the dawn of time, their character has certainly evolved, with such protagonists increasingly able to organise themselves at much greater scale. As we have seen, this phenomenon is largely the product of a shift towards technologically enabled meta-networks in which relationships are forged at an accelerated pace and where knowledge, capabilities and expertise are readily sourced within a globally connected neo-liberal market economy. Thus, whilst state actors typically guard their capabilities closely, non-state clandestine groups (somewhat ironically given their character) benefit from a more open and fluid environment in which tactics and methods developed in different contexts flow quite rapidly from one organisation to another. Actors can once again readily expand or adapt their activities by acquiring the services of third-party service providers in the international marketplace whose expertise, specialist skills and *savoir faire* can tip the balance in their favour at moments of strategic risk and opportunity. Moreover, significant investment over the years from the private sector in modern information and communication technology infrastructure such as the servers and fibre optic cable networks that form the backbone and gateways of the internet have essentially offered clandestine actors with cutting-edge, almost instantaneous coordination capabilities as well as the ability to broadcast new ideas and direct subversive and criminal activities from afar.

This evolution is not insignificant, having provided a means of running remote infiltration campaigns and expeditionary warfare. Contemporary clandestine non-state actors are therefore in the unprecedented position of being able to directly harness a blend of government-type expertise, commercially available capabilities and even 'off the shelf' training resources (including, in the case of al Qaeda, academic and think tank publications) in the formulation and execution of their policies. Arguably, this has further levelled the playing field between states and non-state actors, whilst lowering barriers to entry for newcomers. Taken even further, the combination of such strategic enablers, the inherent or 'natural' tendency (to return to Nietzsche) for clandestine non-state actors to expand their influence through the targeted projection of power, and their increased ability to operate across both physical and

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Iran-Hezbollah Alliance Reconsidered: What Contributes to the Survival of State-Proxy Alliance?, Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs, Vol. 7, Issue 1, 2020, pp. 101-123.

[985] However, it is once again important to clarify that the use of violence and coercion, does not *define* these actors in the way that the counter-terrorism, insurgency and (to a lesser extent) organised crime literature suggests. Instead, their application of violence in both 'internal' and 'external' contexts constitutes a strategic policy choice – a bargaining chip that can be played (or a lever that can be pulled) - depending on the context (with, say, peaceful economic relations and so-called *pax mafiosas* favoured at other times).

virtual borders may pave the way for the rise of 'intercontinental' insurgencies and criminal networks (or indeed a hybrid combination of both) capable of conducting different forms of infiltrative and subversive activity across multiple fronts. Such globally networked clandestine non-state power systems would function by identifying, exploiting and then ultimately connecting local ecosystems that are ripe for the picking, such as pockets of instability, dens of (urban) economic inequality and politically marginalised communities.

Levels and trajectories of clandestine activity

The above notion of highly connected, large scale power systems (re)introduces the question of whether clandestine non-state actors will attempt to grow in both size and influence wherever possible (including via the aforementioned mechanisms and relationships). Indeed, and despite the ability to demonstrate strategic patience and avoid overstretch, the patterns identified in this thesis might support the view that clandestine groups seek to expand over time, almost 'naturally' adopting a trajectory in which they morph into state entities (here, the reader may also recall Stephen Biddel's helpful notion of the state–non-state 'continuum'). Thus, smaller or 'start up' groups with limited means and/or tactical sophistication will often strive towards evolving into larger, 'high power' clandestine organisations with the ability to exert at least partial political control over geographic pockets through force, consent or co-option.[986] These same actors, it could be further argued, might subsequently attempt to ascend to the level at which they are effectively able to 'take over', supersede or replace the state, thus essentially transitioning from non-state actor to state actor.[987] Such a line of reasoning would treat clandestine substate forces as the metaphorical equivalent of volcanoes erupting below the ocean's surface to create new landmass and altering existing maps (in this case that of the international system). It might also point to the number of states within the international order, including medium to great powers, that were at one point or another the product of clandestine non-state actor movements: French, American and Russian revolutionaries, Iranian radicals, Balkan criminal 'entrepreneurs'-turned-politician, and Chinese and Vietnamese guerrillas, to name but a few.

This dynamic in which clandestine groups and state actors manifest themselves along a continuum must of course be taken to its logical conclusion – one that may well appeal to Neorealists. If clandestine non-state actors, perhaps as a reflection of natural, power-seeking human behaviour, do indeed lean towards a Clausewitzian notion of 'absolute' rule (in this case evolving into states before logically continuing their expansion towards quasi empire-type entities),[988] it then also follows that they might only be kept in check by equal and opposing forces and/or configurations of power along the way; a function that may inevitably fall to other states. In other words, and somewhat paradoxically, the very power, in a Hobbesian sense, keeping such actors 'in awe' amidst their progression may indeed be the international system *itself* within which states – including those resulting from clandestine non-state actors' ascension to power – exist. Conversely, the fact that clandestine movements may well act as a prequel to the (re)formation of states could explain why the latter increasingly and, perhaps instinctively, are returning to indirect methods of warfare and power projection so often espoused by these same groups, particularly when entering periods of multipolarity.[989] The implications of this dynamic are that existing theory, including Neorealist paradigms, need not necessarily be dismissed as irrelevant to the object of study but instead expanded to account for sub-national forces and protagonists.

[986] Many insurgent movements, guerrilla groups, large mafia groups and cartels (as well as hybrid combinations thereof) fall within this category.
[987] This level typically involves close to full control over the previous regime's institutions and capabilities, including those of the military.
[988] A trend which *inter alia* can be observed through the historical cases of France, Russia and China.
[989] Further commentary on this trend and its implications is offered in Annex D.

At the same time however, and far more uncomfortably for traditional International Relations theorists, a growing propensity towards the forging of cross-border relations between different social entities within the lower (or parallel) orbit of the clandestine international 'order' raises the question of whether an evolution towards state-type entities *is* in fact the only trajectory available to (clandestine) non-state actors. Indeed, their ability to increasingly connect, interact and project power at greater scale, coalesce around ideas, grievances, identities and markets, and tap into global communications, transport solutions and financial systems, suggests that these actors may have developed the means of circumventing the state-based international system altogether, developing and organising themselves as part of new constellations of geographically dislocated power. In other words, clandestine non-state actor groups in the modern world *need* not necessarily take over the state but may instead secure their gains 'from within' by connecting different local pockets of quasi 'sovereign' power situated at the sub-state level around the world.[990] Such pockets of localized, de-facto control, when combined, may aggregate up to significant entities capable of posing a direct challenge to the viability of the traditional, 'rules based' order. This paradigm would not only support the notion of an alternative, non-state-actor–centric international system but would also point to an additional pattern in which the global order is gradually being reshaped and remolded – and states ultimately supplanted as the dominant entity – from below. Infiltration, subversion and fluidity, the philosophical and doctrinal tenets of the clandestine protagonist, may thus lead to the gradual erosion and, ultimately, the undoing, of both the state-based international system and the increasingly tired concept of state sovereignty.

New Orleans, 1814. Continued hostilities between America and Britain amidst the War of 1812, a conflict sometimes dubbed as the Forgotten War, had left US Major General Andrew Jackson facing a conundrum. As the commander with responsibility over large parts of America's southern territory, including Tennessee, Louisiana and Mississippi, he was all too aware of Britain's intention to invade the near-defenceless city – a vital seaport and gateway to the mighty Mississippi River. At the same time, Jackson did not have the troops to repel the superior invading force who only the previous year had defeated Napoleon in Europe. The General was committed to the task however, owing Britain "a debt of retaliatory vengeance" for having made him a prisoner during the Revolutionary War.[991] Resolved not to let New Orleans fall, he set about the task of assembling a strange assortment of frontiersmen, militiamen, French and Spanish Creole volunteers, Free Men of Colour and Choctaw Indians to fight alongside conventional US troops.[992] In a secret meeting which, legend would have it, took place on the second floor of Old Absinthe House, deep in the city's French Quarter, he then rallied Jean Laffite, a notorious privateer and smuggler, to the cause.

Laffite, an enigmatic character with "dark, piercing eyes" and a penchant for gambling who looked more like a gentleman than a pirate, had built a name for himself by preying on Spanish merchant ships from his own little fiefdom of Grand Terre Island in Barataria Bay, at the entrance of the Gulf of Mexico.[993] His enterprise involved delivering plundered goods to the (often-grateful) citizens of Louisiana who, for years, had suffered from the combination of a US embargo on international trade aimed at depriving Europe from raw material and a British

[990] A variation of this theme might include combining 'formal' control over sovereign state territory with influence in wider territories as perhaps seen in the case of the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban.
[991] R.V. Remini, *The Battle of New Orleans*: *Andrew Jackson and America's First Military Victory*, New York, Viking, 1999, p. 15.
[992] N. J. Lorusso, *The Battle of New Orleans: Joint Strategic and Operational Planning Lessons Learned*, Small Wars Journal, June 24, 2019, https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/battle-new-orleans-joint-strategic-and-operational-planning-lessons-learned.
[993] W. Groome, *Saving New Orleans*, Smithsonian Magazine, August 2006, https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/saving-new-orleans-125976623/.

blockade targeting American commerce.[994] Using a blacksmith shop as a front, Laffite sold his loot, which included slaves seized in the waters around Havana, in sizable quantities, assisted by merchant connections of the likes of Joseph Sauvinet, a wealthy Frenchman and prominent figure on the New Orleans business scene.[995]

In a twist in the tale, the privateer's services had previously been solicited by the British in exchange for a small fortune, but Laffite, after feinting interest and surely hoping for favour, reported the approach – and, accordingly, British intentions – to the US Government.[996] Aroused by similar motivations, Laffite agreed to fight for Jackson in exchange for a full pardon for him and his men. When the British Redcoats advanced, Jackson's eclectic army held the line as Laffite's men delivered highly effective artillery fire, driving their adversary back in a series of pitched battles that culminated in American victory on January 8th, 1815. Exonerated and armed with an official pardon, Laffite returned to what he knew best: he established a new settlement that he renamed Campeche, this time on the island of Galveston in Texas, which he duly turned into a new smuggling centre.[997]

Jean Laffite's different personas were varied: part organised criminal, militiaman, politician, diplomat, entrepreneur and double agent. Here was a privateer with his own sphere of local influence and a degree of legitimacy who cut a deal with a future President of the United States (Jackson would serve as the 7th President from 1829 to 1837), whilst negotiating with – and raiding on behalf of – other foreign powers.[998] That such dynamics remain a feature of contemporary clandestine organisations is, as this thesis has shown, clear. What remains to be seen in the modern world is the extent to which governments around the globe will in the future only really serve at the behest and discretion of clandestine non-state networks as the entities with whom power will ultimately rest.

[994] *Ibid*.
[995] M. A. Wegmann *et al.*, *Lafitte's Blacksmith Shop and the Battle of New Orleans*, https://neworleanshistorical.org/items/show/616.
[996] J. Sugden, *Jean Lafitte and the British Offer of 1814*, Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association, Vol. 20, No. 2, 1979, pp. 159–167.
[997] *Jean Laffite*, Galveston & Texas History Centre, https://www.galvestonhistorycenter.org/research/jean-laffite.
[998] Laffite carried a letter of marque – essentially conveying diplomatic authority – from the government of Cartagena in modern-day Colombia.

ANNEX A: Case study sample

This Annex outlines the sample of a wider range of case studies that was analysed and drawn on as part of the research, including within the context of developing the analytical framework. In total it covers over thirty clandestine non-state actors drawn from across different geographical and operating contexts as well as historical periods. Some of these actors are neatly defined (such as where these have a clearly formed identify), whilst others are more fluid/or situated within wider umbrella organisations. Whilst the list is broadly balanced between organised crime, terrorist and insurgent (or, indeed, guerrilla) organisations, a number of these groups could fit within multiple categories – a conceptual and definitional challenge that has been raised throughout this thesis.

Group	Period of activity	Activities	Geographic area of operations
'Afghan' Mujahideen	1979 - 1989	Guerrilla warfare and use of terrorist tactics including raids, bombings and anti-aircraft operations.	Afghanistan and Pakistan, but with wide-ranging links to various communities of support and financial backers.
Albanian Mafia	Circa mid-1990s - present	Large wholesale distribution of narcotics, brokering relationships, Use of violence and intimidation.	Pan-European. Senior-level linkages to Latin American cocaine producers.
Al Qaeda	1988 - present	Terrorist attacks, including high-profile bombings and hijackings against both civilian and government targets. Financial support, training and guidance to affiliates.	Afghanistan, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia (core), with links to affiliates across the Middle East, Asia, North Africa, Sahel, East Africa and Balkans.
Al Shabaab	2006 - present	Terrorist attacks against foreign targets, including complex assaults and raids; guerrilla warfare. Provision of governance services.	Somalia, Kenya, Ethiopia.
Boko Haram (and variants)	2002 - present	Terrorist tactics (including suicide attacks), hostage-taking, irregular warfare, including through the use of heavy weapons.	Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger, Chad, Mali.
Chicago Outfit (Al Capone)	Circa 1910-1931	Smuggling, bootlegging, racketeering, targeted violence (including assassinations)	Chicago, USA with links to overseas liquor distributors, including in Canada and Mexico.
Chinese Communists	1927-1949	Guerrilla campaign eventually evolving into conventional warfare and the victory of the communists.	China, although the Communists became active in numerous (proxy) conflicts after ascending to power.
Cosa Nostra (Italian Mafia)	19th century - present.	Poly-criminal activities - including trafficking and extortion. Provision of local protection services and infiltration of political and economic	Italy (epicentre in Sicily), US, pan-European relationships.

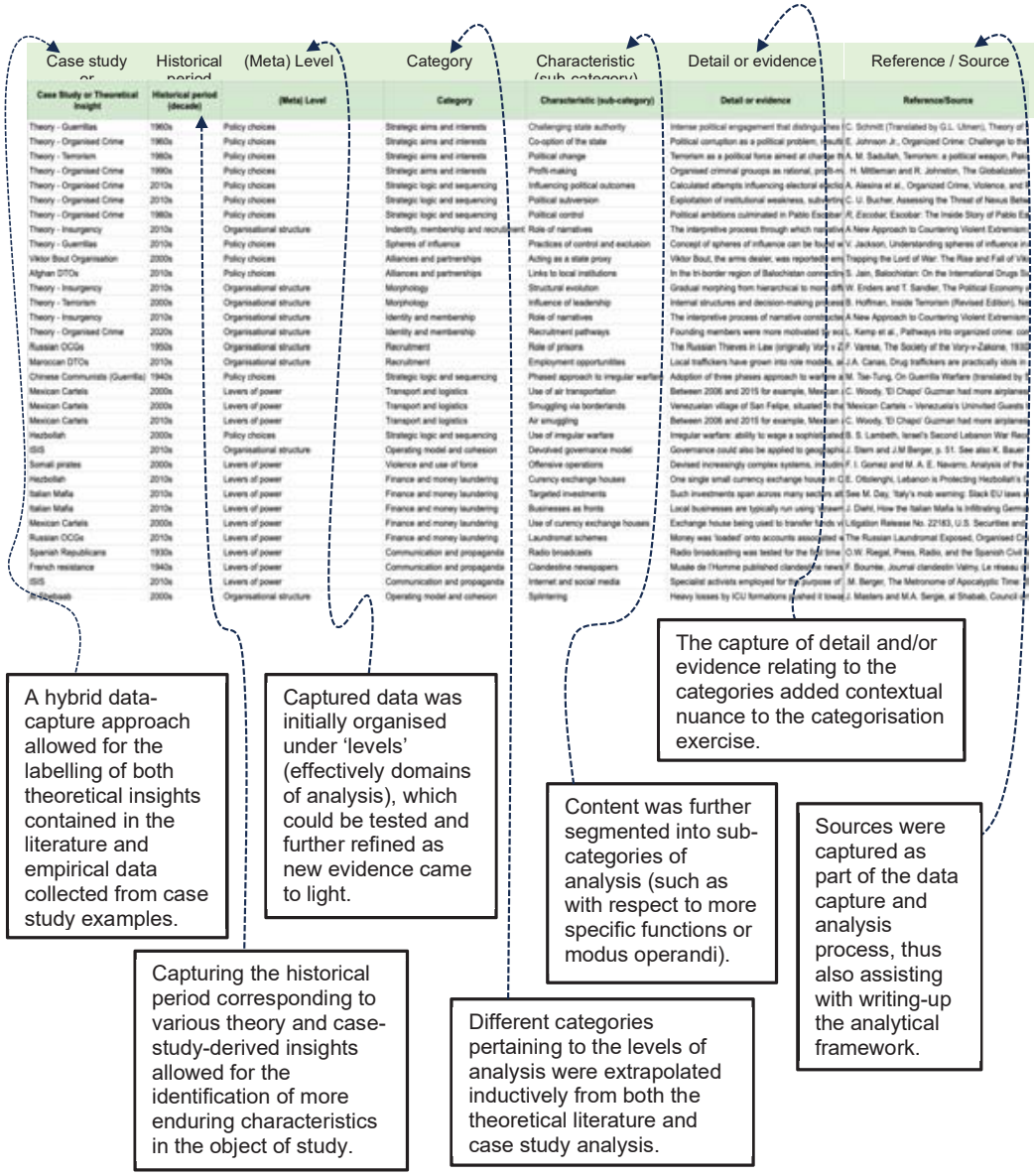
	(Although different branches - e.g., US - emerged later)	structures. Use of violence and intimidation, including bombings and assassinations (waging 'war' with the state).	
Cuban Revolutionaries	1956-1959	Guerrilla war, initially focused in rural areas. Gradual territorial gains leading to political control of Cuba.	Cuba, with subsequent attempts to export the revolution to Latin American and Sub-Sharan Africa.
D-Company (Dawood Ibrahim)	Circa 1979 - present	Extortion, gambling, narcotics and arms trafficking, pirated Bollywood films as well as involvement in terrorist activities (including through links to militant groups).	India, United Arab Emirates, Pakistan
Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC)	1964 - present	Guerrilla warfare (including through use terrorist tactics and hostage takings). Increased involvement in narco-trafficking during its existence.	Primarily rural Colombia but links into Venezuela as well as international drug trafficking connections.
Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat (GSPC)	1988- 2007	Terrorism (including bombings and assassinations), hostage takings, smuggling and trafficking in contraband.	Algeria and across the Sahel (particularly following its re-branding as an al Qaeda affiliate). Links to Libya.
Haji Juma Khan Drug Trafficking Organisation	Circa 1999-present	Production and transport of heroin, money laundering and support to the Taliban insurgency (including through finance and materiel). Strong presence and influence in the Afghan-Baluchistan.	Afghanistan/ Pakistan border are (Baluchistan), with links to associates further afield, including in Iran and Dubai.
Hamas	1987 – present	Terrorist (including suicide) and armed and rockets attacks, and irregular warfare, primarily aimed at targets in Israel by the al-Qassam brigades (military wing). Won the Gaza elections in 2006 and has governed the territory since 2007.	Gaza Strip (Palestinian Territory) with connections to regional groups including Hezbollah, the Islamic Jihad and (more loosely) Houthis in Yemen.
Hells Angels Motorcycle Club (HAMC)	1948 - present	Drug trafficking, theft, violence and intimidation (including against rival groups).	Original Chapter in San Bernardino, California. 59 further Chapters established around the world.
Hezbollah	1985 - present	Use of terrorist tactics, including suicide bombings and assassinations, (para)military operations involving use conventional capabilities (e.g., rockets), money laundering.	Lebanon, Syria, Israel, strong presence in Latin America.

International Brigades (Spanish Civil War)	1936-1939	Guerrilla warfare and intelligence gathering (trained by the Soviet Union in an early example of proxy-warfare).	Spain, but constituting foreign fighters from 50 countries.
Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS, previously al Qaeda in Iraq)	2014 - present	Terrorist attacks (including suicide bombings), irregular warfare, hostage taking, governing over seized territory, industrial-scale oil production and smuggling.	Iraq, Syria and Libya, with affiliates in Afghanistan, Pakistan, West Africa and the Sahel.
Khanani Money Laundering Organisation (KMLO)	Early 200s - 2016	Money laundering and transfer services via hawala banking for organised criminals, insurgent and terrorist groups, including via the UAE-based United Arab Emirates-based Al Zarooni Exchange.	Remittances to and from the UAE, Pakistan, United States, Canada, United Kingdom and Australia amongst other countries.
Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LET)	1987 - present	Terrorist and insurgent attacks against military and civilian targets (including 2008 Mumbai attacks). Maintenance of training camps. Provision of grassroots and humanitarian services in Pakistan.	Pakistan, Afghanistan, India.
Somali Pirates	2008-2012	Hostage taking, intimidation, maritime raids, money laundering.	Somalia and Gulf of Aden, with financial links further afield.
Maras (Central America)	Mid 1980s - present	Drug trafficking, extortion, protection rackets, intimidation and violence.	Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala (presence across Central America), United States.
Medellin Cartel	1972-1993	Production and distribution of cocaine, cross-border smuggling operations (including by sea and air), violence (including use of terrorist tactics). Shadow governance by way of financial contributions in and around Medellin.	Colombia, with international links, including to the United States and Europe.
Moroccan Hashish Trafficking Organisations	Circa 1960s - present	Cultivation, production and smuggling of the hashish from the Riff across the Mediterranean and some distributions activity in western Europe. Links to and funding of local political figures.	Morocco, Spain, Western Europe (including France, Belgium and the Netherlands).
'Ndrangheta (Italian Mafia)	Circa 19th century - present	Cocaine trafficking, high-level money laundering, localised political and economic control, violence and intimidation (including the use of targeted assassinations and bombings).	Stronghold in Calabria (Italy); Presence in Germany, Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Spain, Eastern Europe, the Balkans and South America.
Palestinian Liberation	1964-present	Terrorist tactics in the form of bombings, hijackings, alongside	Historically Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Israel, Tunisia. Presence or offices in

Organisation (PLO)		rocket attacks; currently pursuing political route.	Europe and across most of the Arab world.
Russian Mafia (umbrella)	1920s (via *vory v zakone* or 'Thieves in Law') – present.	At least 200 groups with transnational reach. Poly-criminality operations spanning across most crime types alongside use of violence. Complex money laundering operations. Close links to the political elite (although group dependent).	Global connections and presence, strongest across central-Asia and Eastern Europe (both in terms of criminal operations and large-scale money laundering).
Sinaloa Cartel	1990 - present	Narco-trafficking, smuggling, violence and intimidation, provision of local grass-roots services in Sinaloa.	Mexico with regional links, including to Colombian cocaine suppliers and United States distributors.
Taliban	1996 - present	Terrorist tactics (including suicide attacks and bombing of high-profile targets), irregular warfare; governing Afghanistan.	Afghanistan and Pakistan, with offices and links further afield (e.g., United Arab Emirates and Qatar).
Triads (Chinese)	Circa 1880s	Drug trafficking, extortion and protection rackets, counterfeiting, fraud, money laundering, human trafficking. Use of intimidation.	Chinese epicentre but with a global footprint, spanning across southeast Asia, Europe and North America.
Victor Bout Organisation	Circa 1992 - 2008	Air transport and smuggling of contraband, military-grade armament for a combination of state and non-state actors (including armed movements), through a number of aviation companies.	Ukraine, Belgium, Angola, Sierra Leone, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Iraq, UAE, Liberia.
Viet Cong	1960-1975	Guerrilla and conventional warfare. Territorial control via established political structures and regional command centres.	Vietnam (main effort), Laos and Cambodia. Supported by external backers, primarily China.
Yakuza (Japan)	Circa 1600s – present.	Drug trafficking, extortion and protection rackets, human trafficking, real estate development, money laundering. Use of violence and intimidation.	Japan, southeast Asia (Thailand, Vietnam, Philippines and South Korea), and the United States (particularly on the west coast).

ANNEX B – Qualitative content analysis methodology

This Annex provides a snapshot of the qualitative content analysis methodology employed as the basis for an inductive approach to identifying the cross cutting analytical categories that underpin the framework of this thesis. As explained in the methodological section, content drawn from both the theoretical literature and case studies was labelled and captured, thus allowing for a systematic review of collated data. Close to 550 such lines of labelled 'code' were reviewed and organised thematically in order to build organically and iteratively an (increasingly granular) picture of the common and overlapping characteristics of different clandestine organisations. The different components of this approach are sign-posted in the snapshot below.



ANNEX C – Analytical framework

The following table provides a summary of the analytical framework and accompanying categories detailed in the methodological chapters of the thesis. To a large extent, this same framework also offers a template that can be applied within the context of intelligence assessment of clandestine non-state actors. It attempts to strike a balance between flexibility and accurateness and is thus drawn from the meticulous examination of both existing theory and a wide sample of case studies. The framework contains three primary levels of analysis, policy choices, organisational structure, and levers of power, which are then broken down into further (sub) categories.

Meta-level	Category	Sub-categories/characteristics
Policy choices and strategic direction	Aims and interests	Internal and external policy choices including with respect to challenging state authority and political control; manifestos.
	Geographical spheres of influence	Control and expansion of territory (at the local and transnational levels).
	External relations	Non-state alliances; strategic partnerships; 'proto-diplomacy'; state backing; inter-group competition.
	Strategic logic and sequencing	Decisions and calculations on how to project power, including through irregular campaigns and or by co-opting institutions.
Organisational structure	Structure and operating model	Systemic components; sectors, roles and functions; network configuration; internal roles and responsibilities.
	Identity, membership and recruitment	Recruitment processes and 'breeding grounds'; role and construction of recruitment narratives and identity.
Levers of power	Violence and the use of force	Use of terrorist and guerilla tactics; coercion; offensive capabilities; role of expertise.
	Transport and logistics	Moving fighters and (illicit) goods; transnational supply chains; professionalisation of logistics services.
	Finance and money laundering	Financial mechanisms and channels; professional enablers; harnessing the global shadow economy; role of technology.
	Communication and propaganda	Means of dissemination; use of communications technology (internet and social media);
	(Counter)-Intelligence	Operational security; intelligence and surveillance capabilities and tactics;

ANNEX D: Implications and lessons for policy, strategy and doctrine

The examination of clandestine non-state actors, including their character, modes of organisation and activities, provides a basis for developing more nuanced policies and responses. Such an investigation, moreover, also offers important lessons for government strategies. Indeed, whilst non-state actor groups have time again observed and learned from governments – adopting variations of state-developed tactics and capabilities and adapting these to their operating needs and contexts – the opposite has not always been the case. However, before arriving at such lessons in strategy, one must nevertheless re-emphasise the importance of understanding these actors as complex and autonomous agents of (international) change with the ability to both combine different levers of power and continuously adapt in the face of opportunity and risk. In this respect, they are capable of making strategic choices that span across the spectrum of activities – from the use violence, including against civilians, to complex economic and criminal business ventures. The challenge, of course, has been that multidimensional approaches to the study of these groups have largely been stymied by definitional boundaries, obstructing a more panoramic view of the ways in which these actors have increasingly transacted across partitions of nomenclature. It is only by breaking down conceptual and theoretical barriers and stepping out of the relative comfort zone of individual disciplines that the observer can begin to decipher the real inner-workings of what constitute increasingly sophisticated adversaries.

This of course carries very specific policy and institutional implications, including with respect to the question of whom within governments should lead on or respond to threats emanating from clandestine groups. Illustratively, placing units or professionals responsible for understanding organised crime groups within law enforcement agencies who, by design, tend to focus on specific acts of criminality and/or criminal justice outcomes carries the risk of 'missing the bigger picture'. Indeed, these agents will typically pursue tactical results that tend to be defined by quantitative measures such as arrests, drug seizures, criminal asset confiscations and prosecutions, rather than by understanding and addressing the strategic and structural drivers of the phenomenon. Instead, this work should be conducted by highly multidisciplinary teams capable of drawing on a combination of political science, sociology, anthropology, social psychology, history and economics (as well, of course, as more traditional law enforcement capabilities) and equipped with the ability to map networks and decipher the adapting strategic character and different roles of the organisations forming the object of study (including where they act as localised *de facto* political 'rulers'). This kind of approach can then form the basis for the formulation of more rounded responses that reflect the complexity of the problem. A similar argument also applies within the context of counterinsurgency, which has long fallen within the purview of the military community (even if this community has, admittedly, taken significant steps to harness wider expertise) and counter-terrorism units, which are typically situated within national security institutions. Taking this further, real gains would be made by allowing a greater flow of information and expertise *between* (multi-disciplinary) communities of practice such as the ones outlined above in order to identify macro-level trends, common breeding grounds and enablers harnessed by different types of clandestine organisations.

In doing so, an alternative analytical framework should be developed to better reflect the character and logic of clandestine organisations. Building on the findings of this thesis, this would start by clarifying the internal, 'sovereign' environments and 'domestic backyards' of clandestine actors – the contexts within which they are able to draw immediate grassroots support and draw on localised stability. This should also identify the social and political terrains, economic footholds, markets, and geographic bridgeheads that are vulnerable to clandestine interference and/or within which these groups are already operating. It would then outline their interests, policies and influences, including with respect to specific spheres of influences. An approach that focuses on interests and policies is arguably more useful and insightful than one that centres around ideology given that the latter can be hard to pinpoint

and may change over time.[999] Policies may relate to a group's immediate sphere of influence, such as asserting greater authority within its 'home patch', or might indeed be 'external' in nature.[1000] The same analytical approach would then set about mapping the balances of power – including (likely) allies and opponents – established in the pursuit of strategic aims, including affiliations with ideologically aligned organisations and/or likely trading partners. Finally, the method would infer the key enablers, financial conduits, resources, capabilities and tactics employed or required in order to achieve their objectives. These steps, taken together, would help to stay one step ahead of clandestine actors and offer more calibrated responses, thus reducing the tendency towards reactionary, 'off the shelf' interventions.

'Learning from the bad guys': projecting influence through clandestine levers in grey zone warfare and special operations.

Overall, the shift towards a more multipolar international system has resulted in the gradual decline of US influence and the corresponding rise of regional powers. These actors have increasingly flexed their economic and military muscles in various arenas around the world, particularly in contested or unstable contexts where the authority of the prevailing state is being challenged. Realists observing these events might point to a realignment in regional balances of power; one in which rising or re-emerging powers are capitalising on tectonic shifts in the international system to reshape the status quo.[1001] Strategists are increasingly referring to the application of nonlinear, 'grey zone' warfare as a means of pursuing geopolitical interests, whilst remaining below the threshold of major war.[1002] Such a strategic logic, in other words, consists of gradually securing territorial or political gains whilst hiding behind a cloak of (semi)deniability. In turn, it is difficult to envisage a scenario where such dynamics do not, as in the case of previous eras of bi- or multipolarity, lead to further attempts at harnessing clandestine non-state actors as non-attributable levers of foreign influence. This was indeed the case following the Peace of Westphalia, during the War of American Independence, and subsequently within the context of both the Spanish Civil War and the Cold War. Today, similar dynamics are observable through, *inter alia,* Iran's continued support to Shia armed groups across the Middle East, China's use of swarms of semi-deniable armed fishing vessels as an informal colonising militia in the South China Sea, and Russia's application of a wide spectrum of deniable levers of influence ranging from disinformation campaigns to opaque private security firms.[1003] Of course, the approach, as we have also seen, will not always go according to plan. Instead, new localised constellations of power and contestation will emerge out of pockets of instability as different groups seek to carve out their own spheres of influence in the parallel dimension that is the sub-state international order.

Despite these risks, however, it likely remains the case that states seeking to repel the sub-threshold, 'grey zone' infiltrative campaigns of other states will equally have little choice but to

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[999] The same may in fact be argued when seeking to understand the foreign policy agendas of state actors.

[1000] Here of course 'foreign' policies need not necessarily involve cross-border ambitions but may, at the group-level of analysis, simply consist of expansion into the next town or neighbourhood. Such a trend is perhaps most apparent within the context of urban organised crime territorial dynamics and related inter-group rivalries, including the use of violence and intimidation as vehicles for expansion.

[1001] To many observers, the dynamic indeed resembles the period of change that immediately followed World War II or indeed the end of the Cold War.

[1002] See for example L. J. Morris, M. J. Mazarr *et al.*, *Gaining Competitive Advantage in the Gray Zone: Response Options for Coercive Aggression Below the Threshold of Major War*, Santa Monica (CA), RAND Corporation, 2019.

[1003] See for example See H. Zhang and S. Bateman, *Fishing Militia, the Securitization of Fishery and the South China Sea Dispute*, Contemporary Southeast Asia, Vol. 39, No. 2, 2017, pp. 288–314; and P. Stronski, *Implausible Deniability: Russia's Private Military Companies*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 2, 2020, https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/06/02/implausible-deniability-russia-s-private-military-companies-pub-81954.

resort to the use of clandestine non-state actors as a strategic counterweight to the activities of competitors. The only alternative to this approach is to place one's confidence entirely on bolstering the capabilities and overall control of the existing (and hopefully sympathetic or aligned) state – one that may or may not be considered legitimate by those over whom it rules. However, such an approach to centralised state and institution-building has proven ineffective over the last two decades, resulting largely in *encouraging* the proliferation of clandestine non-state actors and the increased interference of external powers seeking to expand their interests and influence amongst political vacuums. Strategic failures in, *inter alia*, Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan, Mali and Somalia bear testimony to those risks. Thus, it stands to reason that rather than emboldening oneself in the likely futile pursuit of developing strong central institutions in states with little chance of long-term political stability or 'survival,' time would be better spent going with the grain, including by engaging with those actors *actually* controlling local pockets of power outside of the wired fences and checkpoints surrounding capital ministries.

Here, it is particularly helpful to reflect upon lessons that can be drawn from a combination of working with clandestine non-state actors in different contexts and from identifying the ways in which their methods and activities can help to guide the development of new sub-threshold capabilities by states. Indeed, with many observers looking to the likes of Russia and China for lessons in 'new' strategic doctrine, it is easy to forget that it is arguably clandestine non-state organisations who are the true masters of asymmetric, sub-threshold warfare. Not only have these groups seldom had the capabilities to engage larger conventional actors, thus developing advanced 'below the radar' tactics and methods; they also perhaps encapsulate the notion of 'hybrid' actor more clearly than anyone else given their historical tendency to combine and customise tactics and capabilities (including those borrowed or adapted from state actors). However, before outlining the central tenets and guiding principles for the application of proxy-delivered, sub-threshold activity, one must pause to reflect upon the delivery structures required within states. Indeed, the flexibility and adaptability demonstrated by clandestine actors suggests that the business of forging partnerships with, and borrowing methods from, these same groups should be that of highly trained, agile formations such as special forces units working alongside mixed-civilian military planning and coordination cells staffed by politically attuned strategists.

With that caveat in place, the observer can start to deduce seven tenets that can be applied to modern-day campaigns aimed at projecting international influence or, indeed, countering others' attempts at doing so.

1. ***Be clear on your longer term aims***. The argument that Russia, China and Iran's application of sub-threshold, 'grey zone' levers of influence stems primarily from their willingness to 'break the rules' of warfare is overly simplistic. Indeed, allied – and then Western – powers readily embarked in such activities during World War I, World War II and the Cold War. A more convincing argument would be that these countries have developed clearer longer-term strategic visions, including in relation to their desired spheres of influence, in a way that many Western governments have not (partly, but not entirely, as a result of shorter electoral cycles). Adopting a longer-term view in relation to values and interests, as well as the translation of these interests into geo-strategic considerations is a critical requirement for guiding the subsequent application of power in localities deemed to constitute key 'centres of gravity'. The fact that such grand-strategic aims had been clarified within the context of the World War I, World War II and the Cold War is in fact what provided the framework for the far-reaching coordination of political, economic, and military levers including sub-threshold instruments of power. Conversely of course, and as we have seen, the development of longer-term strategic visions is not something that clandestine actors have struggled to do. Thus, the age-old Clausewitzian principle of clearly defining the political objective and focusing overwhelming resources and effort against it remains applicable in the era of grey-zone warfare.

2. ***Accept the need for strategic patience***. Having defined the strategic aims, it follows that one must be willing to commit to these over the long term, including with respect to forging strategic partnerships with clandestine non-state actors. Whilst gains can be made quite rapidly in some contexts – as was the case with the advance of the Northern Alliance in the shaping phase of Afghan conflict – states involved in the business of infiltrative influence or counter-influence campaigns will need to accept that expansion within contested spaces can often be a lengthy enterprise. This of course is something that has been recognised by generations of guerrilla and insurgent leaders, ranging from Mao Tse-tung and Vo Nguyen Giap to Ayman al-Zawahiri. Henry Kissinger, describing the experience of Vietnam, thus explained that the whilst the US "fought a military war; our opponents fought a political one. We sought physical attrition; our opponents aimed for our psychological exhaustion. In the process we lost sight of one of the cardinal maxims of guerrilla war: the guerrilla wins if he does not lose. The conventional army loses if it does not win."[1004] If anything, the need to accept a graduated, incremental approach to securing gains in contested spaces actually *strengthens* the case for employing clandestine proxies – not least given the complexity of securing domestic political support for lengthy deployments of conventional troops and capabilities. As we have seen, however, embarking in relations with non-state actors will inherently carry risk – including that of losing control and influence over these agents as well as that of actors 'defecting' to adversaries. These would therefore need to be carefully weighed throughout planning processes.

3. ***Identify political power bridgeheads, brokers and breaching points in strategic locations and then work outwards, but without overextending yourself.*** Such an approach consists of identifying local environments and constituencies that may well be receptive to infiltration or contact. Outreach and initial contact be made either via intermediaries or through specialist units acting as what Ernesto 'Che' Guevara described as 'vanguards' – establishing relationships with aligned or sympathetic actors. Such approaches should not, however, follow the traditional counterinsurgency principles of 'clear, hold and build' or other variations on David Galula's 'ink spot' approach.[1005] That logic – which effectively relies on establishing formal (i.e., state) governance and infrastructure – is hugely costly and runs the risk of threatening or displacing the spheres of influence of the very same local actors that the external intervenor is reliant upon in order to make strategic gains. It is in fact very possible that such approaches contributed heavily to failures in contexts such as Iraq and Afghanistan (although such a diagnostic is beyond the scope of this thesis). Instead, the establishment of 'friendly' power bases should be pursued by working pragmatically with the local political and social grain. Once 'secured,' the objectives and activities of different power nodes can be coordinated by connecting them directly to one another via logistics and communicating links.

4. ***Dominate and exploit the information space, but only in pursuit of very specific effects aimed at undermining adversarial gains***. The use of information tools should be used in a highly calibrated manner and focused entirely on undermining the adversary's reputation and/or ability to establish their own political footholds amongst key constituencies. The intervener need not attempt to enhance their own comparative reputation given the need for deniability. Sympathetic local actors in areas of adversary (proxy) control or interest should be the main vehicle of information warfare, although messages in those areas can also be broadcasted remotely, such as through social media platforms and group messaging applications. Narratives disseminated through these

[1004] H. A. Kissinger, *The Viet Nam Negotiations*, Foreign Affairs, January 1969, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/1969-01-01/viet-nam-negotiations.
[1005] I. Roxborough, *Learning and Diffusing the Lessons of Counterinsurgency: The U.S. Military from Vietnam to Iraq*, Sociological Focus, Vol. 39, No. 4, 2006, pp. 319–346.

platforms should in turn be constructed in a way that is likely to resonate with audiences, building on existing grievances. These should therefore be highly localised, following an 'informational divide and conquer' logic. Separate pockets of support – or, more specifically, dissent – can then (once again) be connected, building up to wider-mobilisation against the adversary.

5. ***Do not waste your time with technical capacity-building efforts***. These are too lengthy, cumbersome and expensive, whilst running the risk of backfiring (images of ISIS and Taliban fighters in American Humvees spring to mind as a symbolic reminder of what can happen when these activities go wrong). Critically, rapid change can rarely be effectuated – or windows of opportunity seized – through such approaches, with adversaries likely to have made strategic gains by the time capacity-building and traditional, military-led 'train and equip' programmes are drawn up and implemented. Moreover, large scale capacity training programmes usually tend to be very obvious, thus carrying the risk of revealing strategic intentions within any given context. A more effective approach therefore consists of the injection of much more deliberate and targeted 'force multiplier' support through the provision of knowledge, tactical capabilities or financial contributions that carefully selected (aligned) local partners can employ and adapt within the context of their own operations. This kind of support can more readily be turned on or off depending on the overall situation as well as implemented through third-party providers (see below).

6. ***Cover your tracks***. As already alluded to, the value of working with and through clandestine non-state actors consists of the relative deniability of such an approach. This, in turn, requires operational discretion and for any linkages to such actors to be obscured. It is for this reason, for example, that surface-to-air Stinger missiles supplied by the CIA to Mujahideen fighters in Afghanistan from 1986 onwards were distributed through the intermediary of Pakistan's intelligence service. Today, this can be more easily achieved by harnessing the many service providers that operate amongst the global black market (a realisation that Russia has been quick to apply in different contexts). The clandestine international 'order' is indeed rife with participants whose services can be acquired as vehicles for the remote delivery of influence and effects. Meanwhile, the shadow economy can provide a conduit for establishing fronts, such as cover businesses, through which these service-providers can be recruited and put to task.[1006] Moreover, many of the 'force multiplier' capabilities that one may wish to supply to clandestine non-state groups are now readily available, either commercially (even in the case of surveillance and strike assets such as drones) or via underground marketplaces.

7. ***Develop an international shadow network of influence.*** One of the key lessons emerging from the observation of clandestine groups – and which therefore equally applies to working with these actors – is the way in which they are able to develop wide-ranging networks of influence across strategic locations. This is particularly noticeable in the context of organisations with transnational aims and operating across borders. Such a logic could in turn be applied by states by working with and projecting power through clandestine actors, not least by developing a large, aligned international network of influence that can be harnessed, including for the purposes of countering adversary gains in both the physical and the information space. Once again, the many service providers of the global non-state marketplace could be employed in the production of capabilities – or indeed media – that could then be distributed or disseminated using local actors. For Western states, operating an agile inter-continental clandestine network of influence would also provide a conduit toward more flexibly being able to rise against those less concerned

[1006] The ultimate controllers of these commercial entities, as we have seen, can also be further concealed through the establishment of complex webs of shell and holding companies.

about operating across sovereign national borders.[1007] The conduct of sub-state influence campaigns would similarly require mapping the network of stakeholders and potential partners – both clandestine and more conventional (such as within academia and industry) – who, together, could allow for the orchestrated projection of effects and influence campaigns across strategic locations.[1008]

'Talking to the bad guys'

Of course, the ability to work with clandestine non-state actors in pursuit of wider strategic aims implies that the need to approach and enter in dialogues with these same groups. Such a conclusion was arrived at recurrently within the context of counter-insurgency campaigns, which, sooner or later, recognised the fact that discussions and deals with clandestine actors constituted the only realistic path towards violence reduction and the establishment of longer-term political settlements. It was perhaps inevitable, therefore, that the United States came to view negotiations with the Taliban as the only realistic exit strategy from Afghanistan – a logic also adopted by Colombia in reaching a peace agreement with the FARC (similar conclusions will inevitably be drawn in other disputed contexts, including Somalia). However, what is striking is that whilst governments and the international community have increasingly accepted the need to 'negotiate with terrorists' (at least those wielding a degree of political legitimacy), they have shied away from advocating similar discussions with powerful organised crime groups. This is all the more peculiar given the close linkages that so often exist between elements of the government and organised crime (indeed in some contexts the two are essentially one and the same). The fact that organised crime groups are highly political in nature and may act as a source of local stability suggests that this reluctance should be reconsidered, particularly in contexts where there is more to lose from fighting organised crime organisations than by cooperating with them.

In theory, talking to criminals is a dangerous business; one that may expose existing corruption and open the floodgates for further criminal groups to enter the fold, attracted by opportunity and perceived immunity. Such discussions may also cement criminal structures and interests within the political settlement thus 'capturing' the state in what could also be referred to as the 'Balkans effect' – a phenomenon in which the criminalised dimensions of armed conflict continue to form a central part of a region's political economy.[1009] However, the case for engaging with criminal actors appears to be equally convincing for at least three reasons. Firstly, the international community's track record of responding to criminal groups is poor, with armed, securitised campaigns such as the 'war on drugs' typically resulting in escalating violence and higher levels of instability and homicides. Secondly, it could be argued that the tendency for organised criminal actors to self-regulate and carve out 'sovereign' areas of control is more likely to repel than attract 'outside' criminal groups. Indeed, inter-group tensions has tended to occur *outside* of periods of 'unipolarity' within the organised crime world, such as when dominant players were displaced, and/or balances of power thus re-negotiated. Thirdly, entering in direct negotiations with organised crime groups can at least offer a means through which to highlight *quid pro quos* and red lines, offering a gradual

[1007] A good example of the type of a networked operating model is that of organised crime groups who navigate amongst large webs of relationships involving a varied cast list of characters such as drivers, light aircraft pilots, ship captains, company CEOs, producers, complicit border guards, violent gangs, solicitors, accountants, bankers, brokers, software developers and document forgers, to name but a few.

[1008] Here, it should therefore be noted that such relationships need not be limited to clandestine partnerships. Moreover, leveraging these connections by working in an agile, networked manner that harnesses technology as the basis for cross-regional coordination would provide a much quicker conduit for seizing windows of opportunity than relying on traditional, cumbersome conventional deployments and interventions.

[1009] See for example P. Andreas, *The Clandestine Political Economy of War and Peace in Bosnia*, International Studies Quarterly, Vol. 48, No. 1, March 2004, pp. 29–51.

pathway for integration (rather than infiltration) within the formal political system and licit economy. Indeed, the fact that organised crime groups already organically tend to move towards more legitimate enterprises suggests that they may be open to such proposals if these were placed on the table.[1010]

[1010] Such a pragmatic stance would not, in the words of one El Salvadorian diplomat, be about "trying to get to heaven," but "trying to avoid hell." See V. Felbab-Brown, *Bargaining with the Devil to Avoid Hell? A Discussion Paper on Negotiations with Criminal Groups in Latin America and the Caribbean*, Institute for Integrated Transitions, July 2020, p. 4.

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The Old War Office, centrally located on Whitehall, London, was recently repurposed as a luxury hotel, the 'OWO', complete with a Spy Bar featuring a replica of James Bond's Aston Martin DB5 automobile. In its heyday, the building had hosted the offices of T.E Lawrence 'of Arabia', Lord Kitchener and Winston Churchill before becoming the headquarters of Defence Intelligence. It is perhaps apt that this is also where the first seeds of this thesis were sown. Deep within the building and surrounded by Chesterfield sofas and somewhat outdated colonial-era artwork, I was one amongst many supporting global counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency operations which, by the early 2010s, had reached their Zenith. This contrast between tradition and modern warfare struck a note: the adversaries and the world were evolving.

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Biography

Julien Bastrup-Birk's expertise spans across transnational threats, organised crime, illicit finance and hybrid warfare. He has previously worked for various UK departments, including in senior policy, advisory and strategy roles. After gaining experience in the UK's Ministry of Defence, Julien led policy teams in the Office for Security and Counter Terrorism (OSCT) before serving as Head of Transnational Threats in the UK's Stabilisation Unit and then as Head of Strategy in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office's (FCDO) new Office for Conflict, Stabilisation and Mediation (OCSM). His advisory work has included the position of lead consultant with the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC), where he authored the UNODC's new Organised Crime Strategy Toolkit (translated into 15 languages) and assisted national strategy-making processes in the Balkans, Sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean. Julien has also worked as a regular consultant for NATO's Joint Warfare Centre (JWC) as well as the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) and has continued to advise the UK government in the capacity of FCDO Deployable Civilian Expert (DCE).

Prior to his PhD research, Julien obtained a first-class honours degree in Politics and International Relations from the University of Reading (2005) and a master's degree in War Studies from King's College, London (2006). His PhD track also benefited from leading a master's module on Intelligence Studies at the Liverpool Centre for Advanced Policing Studies (Liverpool John Moores University, 2023-2024) and delivering guest lectures at King's College, London (Future of War module, 2022). Julien is an Associate Fellow at the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) and has deployed on tours of duty, field missions and diplomatic duties in over 30 countries around the world.

This research seeks to establish whether there are observable and consistent patterns in the behaviours and characteristics of different clandestine non-state actors – specifically, terrorist, insurgent and criminal organisations – with respect to challenging the authority of the sovereign state and projecting political power. In order to do so, it introduces a bespoke analytical framework that is applied to the granular comparative analysis of three groups: the 'Ndrangheta branch of the Italian mafia, al Qaeda 'core' and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC).

The dissertation's central argument is that clandestine non-state actors need to be understood as independent, quasi-sovereign agents of political change capable of articulating complex policy choices, establishing micro spheres of influence and adopting the range of levers of power available to states, albeit typically at a smaller scale. It also argues that these actors are adept at forging external relations and strategic partnerships – in effect 'foreign' policies – and that technology has increased their ability to connect, trade and cooperate as effective cross-jurisdictional networks.