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

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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 identity), 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.

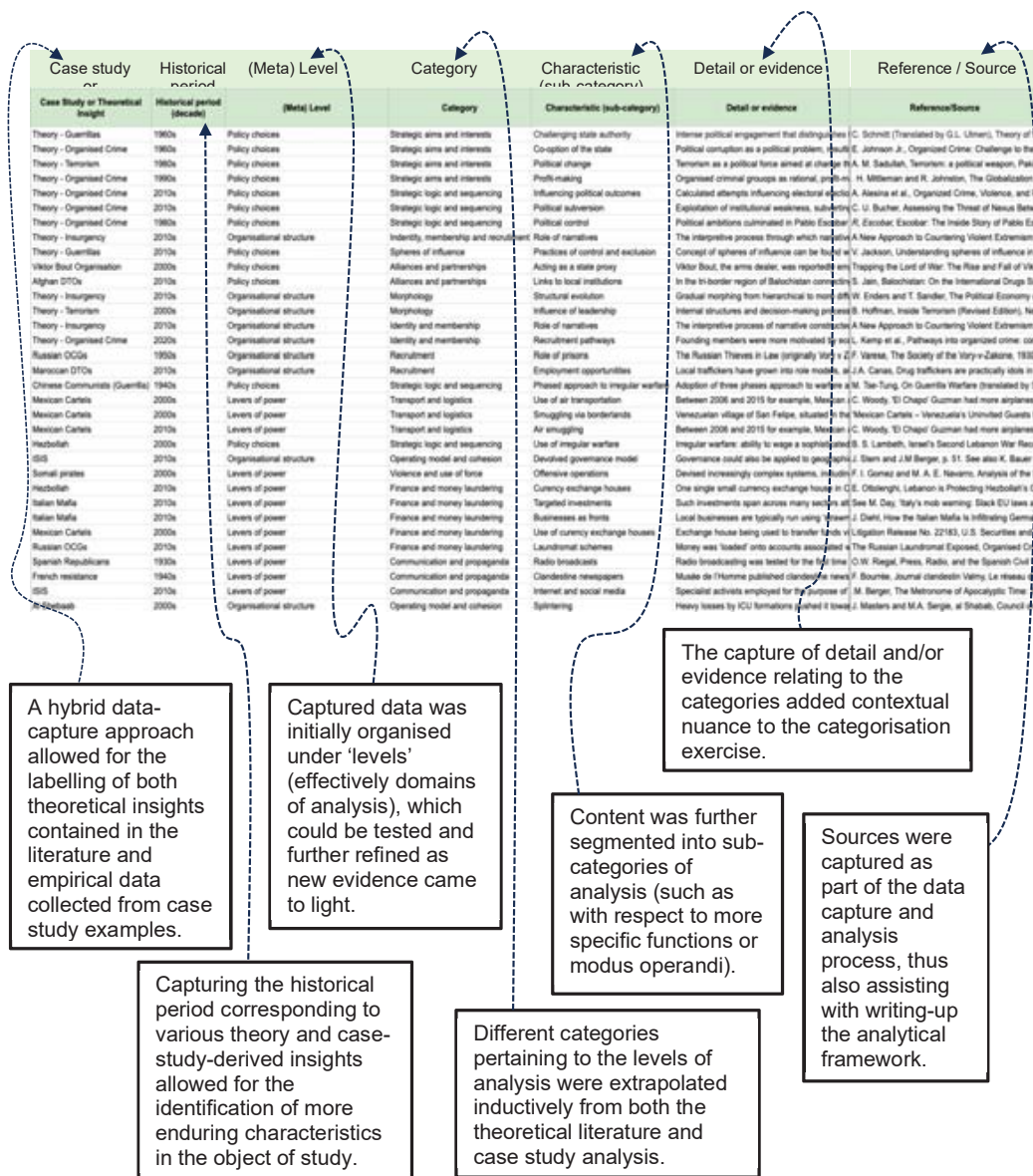
	(Although different branches - e.g., US - emerged later)	structures. Use of violence and intimidation, including bombings and assassinations (waging 'war' with the state).	
Cuban Revolutionaries	1956-1959	Guerrilla war, initially focused in rural areas. Gradual territorial gains leading to political control of Cuba.	Cuba, with subsequent attempts to export the revolution to Latin American and Sub-Saharan 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 Rif 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 <i>vory v zakone</i> 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

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 intervenor 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.