

Chaos, International Terrorism and Beyond: A Strategic Prognosis

Xavier Raufer^{*}

Theme: During the historical interval from 1989 to 2001, the *nature* of the enemy has changed. Previously, the enemy was known, stable and familiar. Today the enemy is evasive, strange and incomprehensible –but just as dangerous, if not more so–.

Summary: During the historical interval from 1989 to 2001, the *nature* of the enemy has changed. Previously, the enemy was known, stable and familiar. Today the enemy is evasive, strange and incomprehensible –but just as dangerous, if not more so–. During the Cold War, all strategic threats were heavy, stable, slow, identifiable and almost familiar (the Warsaw Pact). Even the terrorist threat was stable and explicable (Abu Nidal). Now, on the contrary, terror offers but a fleeting glimpse of a brutal, irrational face, as with the Aum cult or the bin Laden networks. In our chaotic world, which real threats are we facing today? What has terrorism become?

Analysis:

The Nature of the Enemy

When a new era begins, the greatest difficulty is to recognise, sufficiently early, the *identity* of the enemy, the location of the battlefield and the nature of the rules of engagement –if they exist at all–. What conclusions can we reach in respect of the real dangers for the world at present?

In today's chaotic world, wars are no longer fought between one State and another and so are becoming increasingly ferocious. More often than not, our opponents fight for things that men hold sacred, clinging to them with a visceral attachment: blood (their lives, descendants, kin and clan) and land (their homes and territory).

This chaotic warfare is contaminated by crime, tribalism and terrorism. The adversary is increasingly a hybrid, part common criminal, part 'political'. A warlord, tribal leader or fanatical fundamentalist, heading a militia or terrorist network funded by extortion rackets and trafficking in human beings, arms, drugs, protected species and toxic waste. By way of example, we can cite the vicious downward spiral into which numerous Sub-Saharan African countries have plunged: failure of the Nation State, proliferation of armed gangs

^{*} Professor at the Criminology Institute and Research Director at the Department for the Study of the Contemporary Criminal Menace, University of Paris II-Panthéon Assas.

and non-ideologised guerrillas, recurrent gang warfare, explosion of organised crime, tribalism, warlord rule and culture of impunity.

Characteristics of Chaotic Wars

Chaotic wars have the following characteristics:

- The abolition of the clearly defined geo-strategic space in which the national defence of major countries once developed.
- A decrease in the number of Nation States that (a) have continuous and controlled frontiers, and (b) comply with current international law.

In consequence, a growing number of the players in criminal or terrorist wars are resolutely indifferent to both States and their boundaries:

- No distinction can be made between civil and military authority, front-line and rear, while militia forces wearing at least some kind of regular uniform become increasingly rare.
- There is the need to face a dispersed opponent, submerged in the population, often mixing with friendly forces.
- There is a cessation of classic combat in open field of battle, replaced by frequent massacres and bloody vendettas (Albania, Algeria, Chechnya, the former Yugoslavia) and by terrorist attacks.

The above phenomena are all part of a tangled web involving criminality of all kinds – trafficking in drugs, toxic waste, human beings (either whole, as illegal migrants, or piecemeal, the human organ trade), ‘sensitive’ electronic components, precious stones (‘war diamonds’), arms– alongside clashes between religious fanatics, ethnic or tribal conflicts, civil war and famine, piracy at sea and in the air.

A New Form of Terror, Undefined and Unexpected

During the historical interval from 1989 to 2001, the nature and pace of terror changed. Previously, the enemy was known, stable and familiar. Today the enemy is evasive, strange and incomprehensible –but just as dangerous, if not more so–. During the Cold War, all threats at a strategic level were heavy, stable, slow, identifiable and almost familiar (the Warsaw Pact). Even the terrorist threat was stable and explicable. Abu Nidal’s *Fatah* Revolutionary Council, for instance: its hideout and protectors were known to all, as were the weapons and explosives it used. It was child’s play to ‘decipher’ whichever acronym happened to be chosen for its actions. Now, on the contrary, terror offers but a fleeting glimpse of a brutal, irrational face, as with the Aum sect or the GIA in Algeria.

Premised on the world of chaos we have described, what are the real threats we are facing today? What has terrorism become?

The Menace: Terror Arising from World Chaos

Today, the conceptual frame of reference within which terrorism has been studied since its first appearance in the 19th century, namely that of terrorism itself, has become too narrow. Since the bi-polar world order was swept aside, terrorism has mutated and to a great extent has moved outside the domain within which it used to be analysed. The broader domain of the threats, criminal or otherwise, which now *threaten* human society

after the fall of the Berlin wall appears to provide a more suitable framework for defining the extent of terrorism and our *conception* of what it is.

Today the real menace derives from hybrid groups that are opportunistic and capable of transformation at lightning speed. The real conflicts (in the Balkans, Africa and so on) are by essence *civilian* conflicts, more often than not ethnic or tribal in nature. Like veritable melting pots of crime, they blend religious fanaticism, famine, massacres, piracy at sea or airline hijacking with the trafficking of human beings, drugs, arms, toxic substances or gems ('blood diamonds').

Thus for the foreseeable future, warfare –the supreme form of conflict– will possess a criminal or terrorist dimension, or a combination of both. Civilians will be increasingly affected (major cities, corporations, the population at large), as was dramatically witnessed by 9/11 and the anthrax attacks in New York in the autumn of 2001. Whether terrorist- or criminally-inspired, these wars will originate in lawless zones around the planet:

- *Post-failed or recovering States* which have plunged into or are recovering from temporary or permanent anarchy (Afghanistan, Albania, Liberia, Sierra Leone...).
- *-Vast urban sprawls* in the developing world which are in the grip of total anarchy (Karachi, Lagos, Rio de Janeiro...), covering thousands of square kilometres and with entire districts and suburbs effectively under the control of organised criminal groups, terrorists, traffickers, etc.

Mega urban sprawls and terrorist or 'criminal strongholds'

Karachi, referred to in the press as a city, in the same way as Paris or Rome are cities, is in reality a shanty town of gigantic proportions, perhaps as big –and certainly with the same size population– as the whole of Belgium. In Karachi, fanatical Islamists who openly support bin Laden have organised demonstrations with more than 300,000 protesters.

Rio de Janeiro has 600 to 800 *favelas* (hillside shanty towns) that take up one third of the metropolitan area, with a population of one million, almost all squatters. Local NGOs describe the *favelas* as criminal strongholds in which one youth in four aged from 10 to 19 belongs to a criminal gang. Gunshot wounds are the highest cause of mortality for that age group. According to police figures, three to four tons of cocaine are shifted through the *favelas* each *month*; 80% of these narcotics are destined for Europe or North America.

From impregnable bases such as these,¹ dangerous groups can strike with ease at centers in the developed world and their symbolic targets.

New Hybrid Forms of Terrorism are Developing in World Chaos

Today, terrorism is a major component in warfare, which it has slowly but steadily contaminated over the past three decades.

In the early 21st century, terrorism is now the central security concern for our governments. It may even be observed that today terrorism has *become* war.

¹ On Karachi, see Anne-Line Didier & Jean-Luc Marret, *Etats échoués, mégapoles anarchiques*, PUF, coll. Défense & Défis Nouveaux, 2001. For Brazil's 'criminal strongholds', see the website of the Department for the Study of the Contemporary Criminal Menace www.drmcc.org, 'Note d'Alerte' nr 2, headed *Cocaïne sur l'Europe: l'inondation approche* ('Cocaine on Europe: the flood is coming').

However this all-pervasive terrorism –every single day, somewhere around the world, bombs explode for a thousand reasons– has also undergone a significant mutation.

The State terrorism of the Cold War era, whether political or ideological, has almost disappeared. Moreover, since the Cold War ended, new players have emerged on the terrorist scene: the hard core are of course fanatics such as Islamist terrorists, but there are also non-political, criminal groups such as mafia gangs, doomsday sects and other such irrational and violent groups.

What Constitutes the 'New Threat' in this Context?

Observation of the reality on the ground in the actual danger zones, with objective assessment of where attacks originate, where real conflicts occur, how the flow of illegal goods and services is organised (human beings, narcotics, arms trade, stolen vehicles...), leads to the conclusion that, since the end of the bi-polar world order, the *real* menace comes from:

- Militias, mutant guerrilla groups, hybrid groups lumping together terrorists, fanatics, so-called *patriot thugs* and army deserters.
- Groups under the orders of dissident generals and warlords, lunatics or plain criminals.
- Unknown and obscure groups, capable of mutating and shifting alliances at lightning speed.
- Groups contemptuous of international law and in particular humanitarian law.
- Groups symbiotically linked to the criminal economy, rooted in that deadly triangle of narcotics, the arms trade and dirty money.

The Biology of Dangerous Groups

The end of the bi-polar world order has brought about a *mutation* in groups which previously were purely terrorist or criminal, and their sudden and unpredictable slide from the *technomorphous* to the *biomorphous* domain.

- *Technomorphous*: previously, trans-national terrorism was carried out by groups retrieved for special services on behalf of States. Salaried and under orders, these groups acted *mechanically*, on a stop/start basis.
- *Biomorphous*: today, complex and dangerous groups proliferate almost organically and so far uncontrollably; they are difficult to identify, define and understand, operating in flows and territories which, in their turn, are barely charted.

Common Characteristics of Dangerous Groups in World Chaos

Let us see if any similarities can be detected between most of the groups mentioned thus far.

In the first place, they have in common the fact that they not really *organisations* at all, in our usual and Western meaning of the term, ie, solid, even rigid structures. On the contrary, these groups are fluid and liquid –when not actually volatile–.

By way of example we can take what the US Administration refers to as 'al-Qaeda', which it insists on presenting as a formal organisation with a 'Nr 2' and a 'Nr 3' –with a hierarchy, in other words– and concerning which it alleges that 'two thirds of the command structure has been eliminated', again suggesting some sort of stable or permanent membership. Such fictions are spread further by various 'experts', who blithely estimate the

'membership of al-Qaeda' at (to quote one example) 1,200... It is, however, child's play to demonstrate that 'al-Qaeda' is *not* an organisation in the way that –to stick with terrorism– the IRA *is* an organisation. To put it another way, it is equally easy to show that 'al-Qaeda' is not simply a kind of IRA, only dedicated to Islamic militancy instead of being Roman Catholic and Republican.

Since August 1998 and its first attacks against the US embassies in Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam, 'al-Qaeda' has seen unleashed against it the fiercest wave of repression in world history. According to our data base, some 5,000 individuals referred to as its 'members' have been interrogated in 58 countries around the globe, themselves nationals from as many countries again, if not more. Furthermore, in the Arab world especially, hundreds more arrests have been conducted in secret.

The world-wide freezing of 'al-Qaeda' funds

[Source: July 2003 report of the group of United Nations experts responsible for monitoring the application of UN resolutions on the fight against terrorism]

Since its first attacks in August 2001, US\$59.2 million held by 'al-Qaeda', by linked companies or entities, or by individuals identified as its 'members', have been frozen or confiscated in 129 countries worldwide: 70% in Europe, Eurasia or North America, 21% in the Middle East (Saudi Arabia, Emirates, etc) and 8% in South-East Asia.

All the above, it should be noted, took place *before* the Iraq war in spring 2003 and the subsequent attacks in:

- Riyadh (Saudi Arabia, May 2003, 35 killed; November 2003, 17 killed).
- Casablanca (Morocco, May 2003, 45 killed).
- Djakarta (Indonesia, August 2003, 12 killed).
- Istanbul (Turkey, November 2003, 69 killed).
- Madrid (Spain, March 2004, 202 killed).
- Taba (Egypt, October 2004, ± 35 killed).
- London (UK, July 2005, 58 killed).
- Sharm el-Sheikh (Egypt, July 2005, ± 90 killed).
- Bali (Indonesia, October 2005, ± 30 killed).
- Amman (Jordan, November 2005, ± 60 killed).
- Dahab (Egypt, April 2006, ± 30 killed).
- Etc.

Let us now consider the case of two major organisations, properly so termed, which also have a global presence for professional reasons: a multinational corporation and an intelligence-gathering service. Say, General Motors and the CIA. What would be left of these two giants if, at world level, 5,000 to 6,000 of their executive and salaried staff were thrown in prison, their offices closed down, their records pillaged, their working tools, bank accounts and financial resources confiscated? Quite simply, nothing.

It should also be noted that the nature of dangerous groups is *hybrid*, part 'political', part criminal. Considerable exchanges between criminal and terrorist groups are currently being reported: the Neapolitan Camorra with the Basque group ETA and the GIA in Algeria, the Dawood Ibrahim gang in Karachi with Islamist groups close to bin Laden such as Jaish-i-Muhammad and the Harakat-ul-Mujahideen. Similar contacts link the IRA with the degenerate, proto-criminal FARC guerrilla movement in Colombia.

These dangerous groups possess an ultra-rapid *mutation capability*, as a function of the now crucial dollar factor.

In most cases and most frequently they are *nomadic*, de-territorialised (or located in inaccessible areas) and transnational.

They are *cut off from the world* and civilised society. Their objectives may be criminal, fanatical, doomsday-driven or entirely spurious –in reality driven by a determination to hoodwink the world in general (eg, in Liberia and Sierra Leone, the murderous bands led by Foday Sankoh under the name of the Revolutionary United Front or RUF)–; lastly, their goals may simply defy understanding (the Aum sect).

- These dangerous groups generally lack State sponsorship of any kind –which makes them still more unpredictable and uncontrollable–.
- Also, they inflict massacres widely, with the will to kill as many people as possible (bin Laden, the GIA in Algeria, the Aum sect, etc).

Fighting Mutating Terrorism: Two Crucial Elements

Criminal or Terrorist Money: An End to the Confusion

What would be a realistic assessment of attempts so far by States to contain money laundering by terrorists or criminals? There is no doubt that their efforts have been ineffectual on the ground: States, their laws, police forces and judiciary seem to move in one dimension, while terrorists, mafias and their networks of arms, narcotics, explosives and currency trafficking move in another. The two dimensions interact only rarely, in the form of seizures, arrests and confiscation which are no more than a nuisance to the malefactors involved.

Islamist terrorists are fatalistic about such losses of material or imprisonment of personnel: ‘we are in the hands of God, we will continue our holy work in prison, or wherever Allah sees fit to lead us’.

Organised crime can afford to take similar setbacks even more philosophically: the amounts confiscated are far lower than regular corporation taxes. Police crackdowns serve only as a stimulus to the criminal elites, caught up in a Darwinian struggle for life: the hunters impose a steep learning curve on their prey, without ever exterminating them altogether –the fittest will always survive–. Lastly, State campaigns are announced in a blaze of publicity, well before the troops move –ever so slowly– into the field. But the world of crime acts swiftly, counter-attacking the very same day, closing down offshore operations at risk and transferring funds to other, safer front companies.

At the outset of the 21st century, the main battlefield of world chaos thus consists of interstices in space and time. These are the two dimensions of operation in which terrorist or criminal money must be tracked down: *space* and *time*.

A battle in uncontrolled spaces involves:

- Lawless zones or ‘grey areas’, intermediate spaces between the territories effectively policed by the true Nation States.
- Neglected zones between ministries, or between the ‘territories’ of particular services (narcotics, human trafficking, terrorism, smuggling, etc).

A battle against time means that these aggressive, dangerous groups, equipped with the latest technology, have gained a huge advantage in time over States that are top-heavy, slow and paralysed by administrative and legal inertia. How so –and why–?

Today, terrorist or criminal groups mostly operate from bases in uncontrolled, no-go areas (mountain ranges, mega urban sprawls, etc). There they accumulate cash, which has to be recycled in a legitimate economy in order for it to be circulated electronically. Terrorist and mafia organizations recruit experts in high finance for this very purpose. Working with a swarm of lawyers and financial consultants, these banking professionals constantly seek new legal loopholes at the global level, studying legislative developments with a single aim in mind: to disguise the true origin of the funds they manage. At every major transaction, a new offshore corporate identity is created and then instantly erased. Business is conducted smoothly and in record time. The launderers have a powerful incentive not to make mistakes, since the sole penalty for misuse of mafia or network funds is death. Doubtless more motivating than a medal or an annual productivity bonus...

The money launderers also know that States and international organisations have short memories, and that they tire quickly of issues. The politicians are so close to the virtual reality of the media that they end up believing that by merely raising a problem they have actually solved it. We need only think of the regular showpiece global conferences on ecological or social issues: 'greenhouse gas emissions to be reduced by 50% in five years', 'extreme poverty to be cut by half at world level in five years'. And in five years, what changes? Nothing...

In the real world, far from the soundbites and the headlines, what can be done to combat the shifting, mutating crime of money laundering? Before any treatment is attempted, a realistic prognosis of the disease must be obtained: the enormous difficulties involved in the operation must be faced up to. The failure to do so represents one of the main conceptual obstacles which, still today, hinder the tracking of terrorist money.

In the US at present, tracking terrorist money is based first and foremost on attempts to freeze the circulation of money, or else on the seizure of accounts and funds belonging to individuals and entities on the terrorist watch lists. The US government's approach is thus premised on the notion that the individuals and entities being tracked are stable and possess a fixed, permanent identity like their counterparts in the West. This may well have been true, most of the time, in the Cold War era, but nothing could be further from the truth today, at any rate outside Europe –and so far as the Middle East is concerned, the notion is patently absurd–.

The Incubators and Battlefields of Terrorism

Already damaging at a general level, the entities outlined above pose a mortal threat in an urban context –especially in the mega urban sprawls of the southern hemisphere–.

A mega urban sprawl means an immense and chaotic area of apartment blocks and projects, escalators, markets and malls, highways, airports, a serious pollution problem, plus shanty towns and rampant crime –plus terrorism–.

Outbreaks of war and violence in the mega urban sprawls of the southern hemisphere can be watched daily on television, in particular in Gaza (the Gaza Strip is in effect nothing more than a gigantic shanty town), also in Baghdad and Basora in Iraq; but they are also frequent in Karachi, Rio de Janeiro, etc.

In the cases of Gaza and Baghdad, crack troops are in the field, equipped with the latest technology and equipment; furthermore, the current governments of both armies have suspended *de facto* the Geneva Convention (treatment of prisoners and suspects, long-term internment without trial, destruction of civilian targets, etc). Yet both Gaza and Baghdad have proved a fatal trap for the occupying forces –in physical and moral terms– and both armies have or will withdraw in the future, without decisive or permanent gains.

Before waging war in a mega urban sprawl or a shanty town, there are more than just the specifics of the geographical terrain to consider:

- The local population is organised in tribes or clans, and its reflex reactions to attack or invasion are driven by concepts of *honour* and *vengeance*.
- Population growth is explosive –Gaza long held the top spot in the world rankings, with a birth rate of 6.8 per woman of child-bearing age–. The second intifada has caused 4,000 deaths, of which roughly three quarters are on the Palestinian side and the rest on the Israeli. But can the respective tolls of 1,000 and 3,000 be compared in terms of the ability of the respective populations to sustain –we might almost dare say ‘absorb’– them? Certainly not.
- The populace is ripe for the temptations of religious fanaticism (Islamist in the case of Gaza and Baghdad) because the vast majority are reduced to abject poverty: the promise of paradise in the afterlife is at least as realistic as the prospects for improving their current existence.
- These societies live in a ‘parallel economy’, partly criminal in nature (trafficking in human beings, drugs, vehicles, arms, etc).

Conclusion: It is clear that the violence and conflicts which ravage the mega urban sprawls and the shanty towns do not concern only these territories alone, but the entire world –and the developed world first and foremost–. Everything we have learned about dangerous territories and entities since the fall of the Berlin Wall shows that criminal chaos, wherever it shows itself, is *virulent* and *contagious*.

Iraq has already become the epicentre of criminal trafficking in the Middle East: hounded by the Israeli army, the Independent Palestinian administration and police force have disappeared, allowing serious criminal disorder to prosper on a scale extending beyond the Autonomous Territories to involve the Palestinian *diaspora*, in the whole of the Middle East and even beyond.

This is the reality which the developed nations must face up to, soon. Criminal chaos may be less spectacular, less newsworthy than the media-conscious terrorism of bin Laden and his like. But it is precisely that chaos which is the *real* menace, both to the developed world and to the world which, in order to develop, has an immense, paramount need for peace and stability –the very opposite of chaos–.

Xavier Raufer

Professor at the Criminology Institute and Research Director at the Department for the Study of the Contemporary Criminal Menace, University of Paris II-Panthéon Assas