



ORGANIZED CRIME GROUPS AND TREX-HYBRIDITY

Date: November 27th, 2020

Disclaimer: This briefing note contains the encapsulation of views presented by the speaker and does not exclusively represent the views of the Canadian Association for Security and Intelligence Studies.

KEY EVENTS

On November 27, 2020, Victoria Dittmar presented *Organized Crime Groups and TREX-Hybridity* at the 2020 CASIS West Coast Security Conference. The presentation was followed by a question and answer period with other speakers.

NATURE OF DISCUSSION

Presentation

Ms. Dittmar's presentation focused on analyzing the development of organized crime groups in Latin America using the TREX Model developed by CASIS Vancouver President, Candyce Kelshall and CASIS Vancouver Executive Officer, Natalie Archutowski.

BACKGROUND

Presentation

Ms. Dittmar has found evidence through her work in Latin America that categorizing violent non-state actors can be useful for law enforcement, but sticking strictly to these categories may not allow us to identify the exact type of security threats that hybrid groups present. This may result in policy and law enforcement responses to organized crime or to violent non-state actors as inadequate. To understand these hybrid groups, it is important to first understand the different characteristics that violent non-state actors possess. The TREX Model, developed by Candyce Kelshall and Natalie Archutowski at CASIS Vancouver, is a framework developed for practitioners to improve the identification of the important characteristics of four different categories of violent non-state actors: Terrorist groups, violent transnational social movements (VTSMs), organized crime, and gangs. The TREX Model takes into consideration questions such as: What do the group's structures look like? How

do they use violence? Is it kinetic violence or is it soft violence? What is the objective of this group and why did they come together in the first place?

Terrorist groups, for example, tend to have hierarchical structures where there is a clear set of leaders and they are typically driven by a particular political ideology. This is different from VTSMs, which are polycentric with different centers of power that are weakly linked with each other in a network. VTSMs are typically motivated to establish identity-based dominance within society. Organized Crime groups, such as the Italian Mafia, have a close knit center of power and a web-like structure and their focus is primarily profit maximization. This differs from gangs who come together as individuals looking to associate with others that are equal to them and are focused on power projection.

Characteristics of each type of violent non-state actor in the TREX Model:

Terrorist Groups

- Goal-oriented
- Discipline
- Motivated by political ideology
- Authoritarian leadership structure
- Strategic use of spectacle violence
- Invisible – except successes

Organized Crime

- Centralized command structure
- Profit maximization focused
- Technology used for profit efficiency
- Operational violence for profit

VTSM

- Polycentric/Networked structure
- Many fluid alliances with other groups
- Identity-based dominance
- Soft violence and kinetic violence
- Strong social media presence

Gangs

- Managed and consent-based structure
- Focused on power projection
- Visibility
- Opportunistic violence

Violent actors that do not fit neatly into these categories may express different elements from all four of the categories. Ms. Dittmar refers to these types of groups as hybrid groups. The Sinaloa Cartel and Jalisco Cartel, which operate primarily in Latin America, are two important examples of hybrid violent non-state groups. These groups have developed cultures that resemble a VTSM while

they remain profit-orientated. In addition, they may have political goals similar, although not to the same extent, as terrorist groups. The incorporation of these different structures and tactics by violent non-state actors is making it more difficult to categorize them, however, there are some commonalities between these hybrid organizations. They are becoming more polycentric and most of them are transnational. Violence is typically used by hybrid groups for profit, yet they may have political aims as well. Additionally, their alliances with other groups are fluid and changing. Due to the emergence of these hybrid violent non-state actors, there is no universal solution for law enforcement in dealing with these groups. Local conditions across cases are important. Dealing with these groups will require increased international law enforcement cooperation and governments need to regain access to areas where non-state groups are exerting government-like control.

KEY POINTS OF DISCUSSION

Presentation

- The TREX Model's purpose is to identify variations among different groups of violent non-state actors.
- VTSMs, terrorist groups, organized crime, and gangs all express different characteristics in structure, motivation, purpose, membership, etc.
- Hybrid groups, arguably, possess characteristics from all four of the categories of violent non-state actors outlined within the TREX Model, which may be a challenge for traditional law enforcement.
- There is no one-size-fits-all solution to dealing with hybrid groups. It will require international cooperation and intelligence sharing between law enforcement agencies. Additionally, governments need to regain access to areas where non-state groups are exerting government-like control.



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