

THE HEURISTICS OF “HYBRID” ACTORS BRIDGING TERROR NETWORKS AND ORGANIZED CRIME

Daniel Little

(Former military officer responsible for planning and training numerous militaries. As Head of NATO Planning at the Warrior Preparation Center, US Forces – Europe, Daniel’s activities ranged from researching the original KFOR training to certifying Corps Headquarters of 27,000 military members to become first time certified or recertified at NATO. In addition to real-world mission planning, he has served as advisor to the US Joint Chiefs as well as numerous militaries worldwide. As a Program Manager in the Pentagon, Daniel authored education courses in the areas of Modelling and Simulation (M&S) as well as strategic technologies. He was a feature speaker at the NATO Lecture series on Modelling and Simulation).

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Although titles are supposed to draw the reader in to explore an article’s content, it is also important to define an issue to an exact, granular level in order to fully appreciate its significance. To date, notions of security, terrorism and resilience lacks explanation in one particular area, namely the existence of ‘*hybrid*’ actors and the *heuristics* that explains their behavior. *Hybrid* actors in security are those who occupy positions in both terror organizations and organized crime. *Heuristics* on the other hand is something learned over time – largely through trial and error (Merriam-Webster, 2018). For *hybrid* actors, *heuristic* behavior not only impacts the power they exercise but also influences the way they bolster their own sense of survival.

Although the two interact with each other, there are distinct differences that define them. Terrorism involves an act that is political in nature. Although it ultimately seeks to change the status quo, redressing the balance sheet of grievances with atrocities against ‘others’ will do for the time being. When they travel to a destination, they make a choice to either blend in within the protection of a ‘contained’ community or assume a more covert, outwardly persona amongst the public at large. Organized crime on the other hand is apolitical with the goal being profitability. Given the cultural landscape of countries, such organizations are normally defined along ethnic lines. Within their community, they corrupt public officials in order to aid their various enterprises. Even when two different ethnic groups are divided by a physical boundary and act with hostility towards one another, the criminal elements will still transact illicit business routinely.

The first example is an organized crime figure that became a terrorist. In Gilbert King's book, 'The Most Dangerous Man in the World (2004), our fixation on Osama bin Laden took the scrutiny away from someone much larger. Dawood Ibrahim fled the authorities in India and settled in Pakistan. When Osama bin Laden was fleeing through the Tora Bora complex for safe haven in Pakistan, it was due to the routes he paid Dawood Ibrahim to use. As the criminal Godfather of Karachi, Mumbai, Malaysia, Singapore & Dubai, 75% of the heroin routes are operated by Ibrahim. In terms of scale, it was Ibrahim who bailed out Pakistan's Central Bank, not the International Monetary Fund. With his hands in the Hawala financial empire and the 'Bollywood' entertainment complex, he is also behind the A.Q. Khan network and the terror group Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT). King alleges that he pays Pakistan's intelligence service, the ISI \$1 billion annually. The 1993 Mumbai attack that killed 300 and injured 1,000 was allegedly Ibrahim's answer to the burning of mosques in India.

Our second example concerns a terrorist trying to hijack organized crime. Whatever reservations Osama bin Laden had about Ibrahim's piety we don't know. What we do know is that bin Laden tried to become his own version in Southern Europe during the 1990s. During the disintegration of the Former Yugoslavia, numerous countries came to the aid of Bosnians lacking the weapons to defend themselves (Gordon, 1992) (Andreas, 2004) (Coll, 2008). Between 1992-1995, Andreas estimated that half of the \$350 million raised by Iran, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Brunei, Malaysia and Pakistan were used to purchase weapons. The trafficking of arms was assisted by Malaysian and Turkish UNPROFOR units (Andreas, 2004: 42) and it was known that ISI elements served with Pakistan's UNPROFOR unit (Chandler and Gunaratna, 2007). As UK General Sir Michael Rose poignantly told me about Bosnia, '*You accept help from wherever you can get it*' (Fort Knox, 1996).

One particular arms shipment stands out. In September 1992, Russian-built cargo planes with 120 tons of weapons arrived in Maribor, Slovenia from Khartoum, Sudan (Andreas, 2004: 42). The most likely resident in Sudan with the interest and the pockets to support the Bosnians was bin Laden (Coll, 2008: 398). Estimates vary but up to 4,000 - 5,000 fighters from the Afghan War against the Soviet Union also fought in Bosnia (Gunaratna, 2003: 176) (Chandler and Gunaratna, 2007: 105). The recruitment, training and fielding of mujahidin was something bin Laden was in charge of back in Pakistan. Since the database was still operational (Gunaratna, 2003: 74), it would not be a stretch to assume he had a role in providing a first-time opportunity for this new generation of fighters (Gerges, 2006). Once the weapons stopped flowing in Bosnia, narcotics and humans took its place (Glenny, 2008) (Cockayne and Lupel, 2009). Although the Dayton Accord required the expulsion of foreign fighters, those that married local women were granted citizenship and allowed to remain (Chandler and Gunaratna, 2007).

Between 1993 and 1994, bin Laden also established charitable organizations in neighboring Albania (Gunaratna, 2003: 13, 177) (Sullivan, 2004: 183). Although it was no secret that Kosovo would follow Bosnia at this point, there is evidence that this laid the foundation for bin Laden to become a *hybrid* actor in his own right. The *Balkan Pipeline* and specifically Albanian organized crime stretches from Turkey to Scandinavia (Naarden and Locke, 2004: 730) and operates an illicit trafficking enterprise at a rate of four times Albania's GDP (Strazzari, 2008: 159). Whatever misgivings the western intelligence community had about yet another regime beholden to organized crime (Eldridge, 2001:49), an enemy had already infiltrated Europe. To hijack

organized crime in Europe meant ownership of the entire heroin supply chain from Taliban-held Afghanistan to its destination in Europe; to include all of the corruption paid for along its routes.

The ultimatum handed to the leadership of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) around March 1998 (Sullivan, 2004: 183) was to either break off with al Qaeda or jeopardize their prospects for independence (Bergen, 2002). With the local Al Qaeda leader dismissed (April, 1998) and later arrested (June, 1998), an attack on the U.S. Embassy in Tirana followed soon after (August, 1998) (Sullivan, 2004). By September, hundreds of Iranian fighters arrived along with another contingent of 7,000 veterans of Afghanistan and Bosnia under the leadership of Muhammad al Zawahiri (Ayman al Zawahiri's brother) (Bodansky, 2001). The sweep by Albanian State Security and western intelligence (Sullivan, 2004) meant that there was not one conflict occurring but two at this time.

A third example is someone in Government who became a terrorist and to this day is taking over both. Drawing from an article I co-authored on ISIS in 2015 (Osokonbaeva and Little, 2015), Gulmorod Halimov of Tajikistan was a former Presidential bodyguard and the Ministry of Interior's Commander of Special Operations (OMON - *Otryad Mobilny Osobogo Naznacheniya*). Having made a name for himself fighting the Taliban and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan along the Afghan-Tajik border, Halimov was promoted to guard the President and received additional training from Russia's Spetnatz (1997-1998), the U.S. Army at Fort Polk, Louisiana (2003) and later with Blackwater (2008). When he defected with members of his cadre to ISIS in Iraq, Halimov made a video promising to return to Central Asia.

With \$70 million in seed money given to him by ISIS, they had an investment in someone who knew how to fight in the autonomous border regions as well as a charismatic leader able to split Taliban loyalty (*ibid*). Just last month (June 2018), the ceasefire between the Afghan Army and the Taliban was disrupted by ISIS car bombs (Smith-Spark and Popalzai, 2018). The goal for ISIS is to control the *faucet* through which heroin travels north and west towards the infidels in Europe (Osokonbaeva and Little, 2015). What makes this nothing short of a *fait accompli* are the rumors that elites in Central Asia are prone to corruption. Who better to know the extent of its tentacles than a former Presidential bodyguard? Except now, corrupt political elites in Central Asia are now Halimov's vassals instead. For organized crime members who are used to buying from the Taliban, the only things that matters is that the heroin is white and the colors of money are either green for Dollars or purple for 500-euro notes.

As noteworthy as Samuel Huntington's classic 'Clash of Civilizations' (1996) or Thomas P.M. Barnett's 'The Pentagon's New Map' (2004), I am also reminded that things happening somewhere else can also be aided by people and events much closer to us than we realize. For readers in the United States, this is especially true. The reconnaissance for the 1993 Mumbai Stock Exchange bombing by *Lashkar-e-Toiba* was performed by Chicago businessman David Coleman Headley (BBC, 2009). The tactics and weapons trainer for Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan, Bosnia and Sudan was Ali Mohammed of Fort Bragg, North Carolina and Santa Clara, California respectively (Gunaratna, 2003) (Scheuer 2006). After 9/11, the Pentagon invited local cleric Anwar al-Awlaki to discuss moderate Islam (Herridge, 2010) some 10 years before they sent a drone strike to kill him in Yemen (BBC, 2011). I also remember a strange ending to a university lecture on terrorism given by an Army psychiatrist named Nidal Hassan –

the ‘Fort Hood Shooter’ (Hagmann, 2009).

While that in itself may be sobering, the whole notion of *hybrid* actors not only pre-dates Afghanistan and al Qaeda, its origins trace back to the United States as well. During the mid-1960s to 1970s, Chicago street gang co-founders Eugene Hairston and Jeff Fort formed a coalition of 21 street gangs with 5,000 members (Harris, 2004: 71-72). In 1967, they formed a non-profit, applied for and received \$1 million in Federal grant money for the purpose of political activism. Using a storefront for a ‘Potemkin Village’ classroom, the money was instead used to buy drugs to sell on the streets (McPherson, 1969) (Jacobs, 1978) (Schatzberg and Kelly, 1987: 101) (Harris, 2004: 71-72). When Hairston was sent to prison, Fort completed the takeover of vice on Chicago’s South Side (Schatzberg and Kelly, 1987: 101).

1969 marks the year that Senator Charles Percy of Illinois secured an invitation for Fort to attend President-elect Richard Nixon’s inauguration (due to his charity work) only to end the year in prison for Contempt of Congress. While in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, Fort converts to Islam and changes the name of the gang to ‘El Rukn’ (Arabic for *The Black Stone*). Once out of prison, Fort applies for a religious exemption from taxes and goes back to the hands-on leadership of a drug enterprise (Brune and Ylisela, 1988) (Blau and O’Brien, 1991). The way this story ends is that Fort is sent back to prison and through taped phone conversations is prosecuted and convicted in 1986 for offering to commit acts of terror in the United States on behalf of Libya’s Moammar Gadhafi (Malcolm, 1986) (FBI, 2018). Fort is serving an 80-year sentence as the first-ever conviction for terrorism in the United States (Brune and Ylisela, 1988) (Blau and O’Brien, 1991).

My hypothesis of what defines a *hybrid* actor are four traits. First, they have to be near or at the very top of a criminal hierarchy in order to have *access*. This means they have the ability to directly engage in cross-border business. Second, they have to exercise *influence*. They have associates speaking on their behalf and reporting back, to include dialogue with corrupt officials. This also means that any intermediary influencing potential *Lone Wolves* cannot be directly traced back to the *hybrid* actor. Third, they enjoy a level of *autonomy* which enables them to practice religion on their terms. They can move back-and-forth between their roles with relative ease. It also means that they have to weigh their criminal role slightly higher so they can maintain longevity over both far longer. Fourth and final, they have to have *capacity*: Defined in terms of number of subordinates, scale of commodities to transact and the liquidity to operate in multiple locations at once.

Given that the issues of migration and vetting are especially timely in both Europe and the United States, are we more focused on *Lone Wolves* merely because they are post-9/11? If so where does this leave our vigilance over the one percent living on the fringe awaiting radicalization? If the *hybrid* actors mentioned in this article slipped through the scrutiny of so many agencies for so long, isn’t the real ‘Clash of Civilizations’ better defined as that between the bureaucratic actors tasked to protect all of us? If asked to name *Lone Wolves*, some of us might actually remember the most recent ones. This however pales in comparison to the four *hybrid* actors mentioned in this article, two of which are still in operation. Perhaps there are others...

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