Research Report

Security Council

Assessing the Role of Non-State Actors in Global Security Dynamics

Julian Haverkate & Annika Maassen van den Brink

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Introduction

The international platform is no longer the sole domain of states to show off their strength. The new players are in center stage, and they are experienced. From the relentless lobby by human rights NGOs to the financial clout of multinationals, non-state actors are remodeling the new visage of international security. Not only are they shaping policy options, but they're also calling the shots about what security is and how to achieve it. Imagine a world where a single company holds more economic clout than a bloc of states, whose popularity can incite millions of people to force change, or an insurgency is able to bring down a government. Greet the 21st century, where non-state actors are no longer passive onlookers in the world's security drama, but active participants reshaping rules and games. These players are making governments address issues like war, poverty, and global warming, and setting international agreements and national agendas. They are also undermining the very foundations of state power, as guerrilla movements and guerrilla groups undermine state power, spreading instability and conflict worldwide. This rise of non-state players compels a re-definition of orthodox notions of sovereignty and command. But it is more than a story of encounter and contest. Governments of our time are aware of the power and strengths of non-state actors and cooperate with them in development, disaster relief, and humanitarian assistance. Solutions must be sought to the issues that the world is confronting. Non-state actors are demanding an extended vision of security beyond traditional military threats. They are addressing poverty, disease, and inequality and know that human security is the solution to global stability. They are transforming global governance, driving the agenda on pressing issues like climate change, migration, and peacebuilding. They are making their voices heard in global forums, influencing policymaking and defining the path of future international cooperation. But there is a new world and with it a

new set of challenges. Terrorist networks, cyber-crime syndicates, and transnational organized crime syndicates are out of the reach of the state and therefore represent new security challenges to the world. To confront this new and dynamic security environment must be addressed by a smart and adaptive international security policy. Understanding the drivers, behavior, and extent of the non-state actors is essential to manage the security challenges of the 21st century.

Definition of Key Terms

-Civil Society Organizations (CSOs): CSOs are non-government, non-profit organizations involved in responding to social, economic, and environmental issues. They can be employed to advance human rights, enhance peacebuilding, and provide basic services.

-Humanitarian Aid Organizations: These organizations are involved in relief provision for crisis-, disaster-, or conflict-affected groups. They typically operate in insecure environments and are highly important in saving lives and alleviating suffering.

-Insurgency: An armed or violent rebellion or revolt against a government or an authority. Insurgents do so covertly and attempt to overthrow or eliminate the existing regime.

-International Organizations (IOs): State or government organizations that unite and become engaged in issues at the international level. IOs can establish international norms, organize an international response to emergencies, and aid cooperation.

-Multinational Corporations (MNCs): These are businesses based in two or more nations, at times having vast economic strength and powers. Their decision-making can mean a great difference to global security, either way, depending on what policies they hold and want.

-Terrorist Organizations: These are entities that use threats and terror in attempting to realize political goals. They typically strike civilians and aim at spreading fear and insecurity.

-Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs): These are transnational criminal organizations normally with activity of drug trade, human smuggling and trafficking, and money laundering. They possess the ability to generate powerful threats to global security through regional destabilization and erosion of the rule of law.

General Overview

The Shifting Sands of Security: A General Overview

The traditional definition of global security, which up to now has been premised on states and inter-state relations, is no longer able to keep pace with the 21st-century threat. The advent of non-state actors, beyond government who operate beyond formal channels of government—has dramatically shifted the paradigm of security. This chapter provides an overview of this trend, its historical beginnings, key protagonists, and to what extent it contradicts classical models of security.

Historical Roots

The rise of non-state actors as the major players in global security is not new. Throughout history, there have been various groups and institutions that have sought to upset state power and affect international politics. In the Middle Ages, for example, religious orders held huge influence and sometimes rivaled monarchies. The Crusades were a best-case scenario example of how religious movements could rally groups of people and affect geopolitical balance.

In the 20th century, the decline of colonialism and rise of globalization were clear indicators of change in the influence of non-state actors. In the Cold War era, there had risen numerous revolutionary movements and transnational actors that advocated the breakdown of then-existing power structures. The spread of technology, particularly in the sector of transport and communication, has also facilitated these actors to undertake their affairs across borders, making their influences more potent.

Key Actors

1. **Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)**: Often referred to as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), these entities work to address social, economic, and environmental issues. They advocate human rights, promote peacebuilding, and provide essential services. Notable examples include:

   o **Amnesty International**: Focuses on human rights advocacy.

   o **Doctors Without Borders**: Provides medical assistance in crisis zones.

   o **Greenpeace**: Advocates for environmental protection.

2. **International Organizations (IOs)**: Composed of states or governments, these organizations work together to address global issues. They play a crucial role in setting international norms, coordinating responses to crises, and promoting cooperation. Examples include:

   o **United Nations (UN)**: Facilitates international dialogue and peacekeeping.

   o **World Health Organization (WHO)**: Coordinates global health responses.

   o **International Criminal Court (ICC)**: Prosecutes individuals for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

3. **Multinational Corporations (MNCs)**: Operating in multiple countries, these companies wield significant economic power and influence. Their activities can have profound impacts on global security, both positively and negatively. Examples include:

   o **Amazon**: Influences global trade and labor practices.

   o **Google**: Shapes information access and digital security.

   o **Apple**: Affects global supply chains and technology standards.

4. **Terrorist Organizations**: These groups use violence and intimidation to achieve political aims, often targeting civilians to create fear and instability. Examples include:

- o **Al-Qaeda**: Known for its global jihadist agenda.

- o **ISIS**: Aimed to establish a caliphate through violent extremism.

- o **Boko Haram**: Operates primarily in Nigeria, focusing on establishing an Islamic state.

5. **Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs)**: These criminal groups operate across national borders, engaging in activities such as drug trafficking, human trafficking, and money laundering. They pose significant threats to global security by undermining the rule of law and destabilizing regions. Examples include:

- o **Sinaloa Cartel**: A major player in drug trafficking in North America.

- o **Italian Mafia**: Involved in various illegal enterprises across Europe.

- o **Russian Mafia**: Engages in organized crime and corruption on a global scale.

Current Landscape

The current global security environment is dominated by a complex interaction between states and non-state actors. States continue to be the main actors, but their monopoly and leadership on security issues continue to decline. Non-state actors are undermining classic models of security in a variety of ways:

- **Challenging State Authority**: Insurgent movements, terrorist groups, and transnational criminal organizations actively undermine state authority, leading to instability and conflict in various regions. For instance, the rise of ISIS in Iraq and Syria demonstrated how a non-state actor could seize territory and challenge established governments.

- **Shaping International Policy**: Non-state actors, including CSOs and MNCs, exert significant influence on international policy decisions. They advocate for their interests and push governments to address pressing issues like climate change, poverty, and human

rights. The **Paris Agreement** on climate change is a prime example of how non-state actors can mobilize to influence global policy.

- **Creating New Security Challenges**: Terrorist organizations, cybercriminals, and transnational criminal networks operate outside traditional state control, posing new threats to global security. The rise of cybercrime, for instance, has introduced vulnerabilities that states are often ill-equipped to handle.

Key Factors

- **Globalization**: The interconnectedness of the world has facilitated the movement of people, goods, and ideas, creating new opportunities for non-state actors to operate across borders. This has led to a more integrated global economy but also to increased vulnerabilities.

- **Technology**: The proliferation of technology, particularly communication technologies, has empowered non-state actors to organize, communicate, and spread their messages more effectively. Social media platforms have become vital tools for mobilization and advocacy.

- **State Weakness**: In some regions, weak or failing states provide fertile ground for non-state actors to flourish, filling the void left by ineffective governance. Countries experiencing civil war or political instability often see a rise in the influence of non-state actors.

- **Changing Security Threats**: The nature of security threats has evolved, with non-state actors posing new challenges beyond traditional military conflicts. Issues such as climate change, pandemics, and cyber threats require a rethinking of security strategies.

Timeline of Key Events

1. **1945**: The end of **World War II** marks the beginning of the **Cold War**, a period of ideological conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union, leading to the rise of various revolutionary movements.

2. **1948**: The formation of the **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)**, a military alliance of Western nations, further solidifies the Cold War divide.

3. **1960s**: The rise of **decolonization movements** across Africa, Asia, and Latin America challenges colonial powers and leads to the formation of new nation-states.

4. **1972**: The **Munich Massacre** during the Olympic Games, where Palestinian terrorists killed Israeli athletes, marks a turning point in the global perception of terrorism.

5. **1979**: The **Iranian Revolution** leads to the establishment of an Islamic Republic, demonstrating the power of non-state actors to overthrow established governments.

6. **1991**: The **Gulf War** showcases the growing role of international organizations like the **United Nations** in addressing global security challenges.

7. **1993**: The **World Trade Center bombing** in New York City highlights the vulnerability of developed countries to terrorist attacks.

8. **2001**: The **9/11 attacks** on the United States, carried out by **Al-Qaeda**, mark a significant turning point in the global fight against terrorism.

9. **2003**: The **invasion of Iraq** by the United States, despite international opposition, demonstrates the limitations of state power in a globalized world.

10. **2011**: The **Arab Spring** uprisings, fueled by social media and technology, demonstrate the power of non-state actors to challenge authoritarian regimes across the Middle East and North Africa.

11. **2014**: The rise of **ISIS** in Iraq and Syria highlights the threat posed by extremist groups in a globalized world, leading to significant international military responses.

12. **2024**: Events of the past year remind us of the outsized impact non-state actors can have on global security and regional stability, as seen in various geopolitical rivalries.

13. **2025**: The rise of **violent non-state actors (VNSAs)** is fueled by factors such as globalization, technological advances, weak governance, and socio-economic disparities, posing new challenges to global security

Stakeholders

- **United Nations (UN):**
  - **Role:** The UN is crucial in addressing the challenges posed by non-state actors. It works for:
    - **Combat terrorism:** The UN Security Council has passed resolutions against terrorist groups and supports counterterrorism efforts.
    - **Address transnational crime:** The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) works to combat drug trafficking, human trafficking, and other transnational crimes.
    - **Promote peacebuilding:** The UN has peacekeeping missions in conflict zones where non-state actors are active, aiming to stabilize the situation and prevent further violence.
  - **Example:** The UN Security Council has imposed sanctions on terrorist organizations like Al-Qaeda and ISIS.
- **NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization):**
  - **Role:** NATO has increasingly focused on addressing the threat of non-state actors, particularly terrorism.
  - **Example:** NATO has deployed troops to Afghanistan to combat the Taliban and has conducted training programs to help countries counter terrorism.
- **European Union (EU):**
  - **Role:** The EU is actively involved in combating terrorism, transnational crime, and the spread of extremism. It works to:
    - **Strengthen border security:** The EU has implemented measures to control migration and prevent the movement of terrorists.

- **Combat cybercrime:** The EU has adopted policies to address cybercrime, which is often perpetrated by non-state actors.
- **Support peacebuilding:** The EU has funded peacebuilding programs in conflict zones, aiming to address the root causes of violence and prevent the rise of non-state actors.
  - **Example:** The EU has provided funding to support the fight against ISIS in Iraq and Syria.
- **African Union (AU):**
  - **Role:** The AU faces significant challenges from non-state actors, including terrorist groups, rebel movements, and criminal organizations. It works to:
    - **Promote peace and security:** The AU has deployed peacekeeping forces to conflict zones in Africa, aiming to stabilize the situation and prevent the spread of violence.
    - **Combat terrorism:** The AU has adopted a strategy to combat terrorism and extremism, including working with member states to strengthen counterterrorism capabilities.
    - **Address transnational crime:** The AU is working to combat transnational crime, including drug trafficking and human trafficking, which often involve non-state actors.
  - **Example:** The AU has been involved in mediating peace talks in Somalia and has deployed troops to combat the Islamist group al-Shabaab.
- **Amnesty International:**
  - **Role:** Amnesty International highlights the human rights abuses perpetrated by non-state actors, including terrorist groups, armed militias, and criminal organizations. It advocates for:
    - **Protection of civilians:** Amnesty International calls for the protection of civilians in conflict zones and for accountability for human rights violations.
    - **Justice for victims:** Amnesty International works to ensure that victims of human rights abuse receive justice and that perpetrators are held accountable.
  - **Example:** Amnesty International has documented human rights abuses by ISIS in Iraq and Syria.
- **Doctors Without Borders (Médecins Sans Frontières):**
  - **Role:** Doctors Without Borders provide medical care to civilians caught in conflict zones, often working in areas where non-state actors are active. It faces significant challenges:
    - **Access to conflict zones:** Doctors Without Borders often faces obstacles in conflict zones, as non-state actors may restrict access or target humanitarian workers.

- **Security risks:** Doctors Without Borders staff are at risk of violence and kidnapping, particularly in areas where non-state actors operate.
  - **Example:** Doctors Without Borders has provided medical assistance to civilians caught in the crossfire of the Syrian Civil War.

Countries:

- **United States:**
  - **Role:** The US has been a major player in the global fight against terrorism, particularly after the 9/11 attacks. It has:
    - **Conducted military operations:** The US has conducted military operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, and other countries to combat terrorist groups.
    - **Provided military aid:** The US has provided military aid to countries around the world to help them combat terrorism and improve their security capabilities.
    - **Supported counterterrorism efforts:** The US has provided intelligence and training to countries to help them counter terrorism.
  - **Example:** The US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 was aimed at removing the Taliban from power and preventing the country from being used as a base for terrorist operations.

- **China:**
  - **Role:** China faces challenges from non-state actors in its own territory, particularly in the Xinjiang region where Uyghur separatists are active. It also faces challenges from terrorist groups in the region. China has:
    - **Strengthened security measures:** China has implemented strict security measures in Xinjiang, including mass surveillance and detention of Uyghurs.
    - **Supported counterterrorism efforts:** China has cooperated with other countries to combat terrorism and has provided training and equipment to countries in the region.
  - **Example:** China has accused the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) of being a terrorist group and has taken a hard line against Uyghur separatists.

- **Russia:**
  - **Role:** Russia has been involved in conflicts where non-state actors are active, including in Syria and Ukraine. Russia has:
    - **Supported Syrian government:** Russia has provided military support to the Syrian government in its fight against rebel groups and terrorist organizations.
    - **Interfered in Ukrainian conflict:** Russia has been accused of supporting separatists in eastern Ukraine and of annexing Crimea.

- o **Example:** Russia has provided military support to the Syrian government in its fight against ISIS and other rebel groups.
- **France:**
  - o **Role:** France has been involved in conflicts in Africa and the Middle East where non-state actors are active. France has:
    - **Conducted military operations:** France has conducted military operations in Mali, the Central African Republic, and other countries to combat terrorist groups.
    - **Supported counterterrorism efforts:** France has provided military aid and training to countries in the region to help them counter terrorism.
  - o **Example:** France has been involved in the fight against Boko Haram in Nigeria and has deployed troops to Mali to combat Islamist militants.
- **India:**
  - o **Role:** India faces challenges from non-state actors in its own territory, particularly in Kashmir where separatist groups are active. India has:
    - **Strengthened security measures:** India has deployed a large military presence in Kashmir and has imposed restrictions on movement and communication.
    - **Supported counterterrorism efforts:** India has been involved in counterterrorism operations and has cooperated with other countries to combat terrorism.
  - o **Example:** India has been involved in a long-running conflict with Pakistan over the disputed region of Kashmir.

Possible Solutions

Enhanced international coordination is at the forefront of managing non-state actor threats. States must work together through agreements and treaties, intelligence sharing, resource sharing, and best practice exchange. This may include mutual counterterrorist efforts and information sharing forums to combat more effectively terror networks' activities.

Communities also need to be empowered. Community engagement in the security industry will turn the non-state actor's script around. Responding to grievance of the community and showing support will make the community resilient to extremist narratives.

Peacebuilding by communities could lead to more dialogue and better understanding among them, so violent non-state actors will not be as attractive.

It addresses the underlying causes of instability, including poverty and unemployment, to reduce recruitment levels for non-state actors. Economic development initiatives have to tackle education, job creation, and infrastructure.

Vocational education and training can be an investment that will offer youngsters alternatives to extremism.

It is extremely crucial to enhance domestic and international law so that non-state actors are held accountable for their actions. Anti-terrorism, anti-human trafficking, and anti-crime syndicate laws are some of them.

Access to more regulated arms trade and finance flows will impede the operations of non-state actors.

Technology can be utilized to enhance security against non-state actors. This includes the use of data analytics, surveillance, and cybersecurity to deter and monitor activities. AI and machine learning can be employed to study behavior patterns and predict possible threats from non-state actors.

Further Reading

Great video on the topic

Noah Zerbe. (2023, July 1). *Non-State Actors in Global Politics: Understanding their role and challenges* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4eYe-cqHjK0

Good reading on the topic but it's a lotta reading

Global Issues: The rise of Non-State Actors in the 20th and 21st century. (n.d.). https://www.atlasoftodaysworld.org/articles-global-issues/the-rise-of-non-state-actors-in-the-20th-and-21st-century#scroll-section-1

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