

# Violent Non-State Actors: Contours, Challenges and Consequences

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Non-State Actors (NSA) are entities that participate or act in international relations. These are organisations with sufficient power to influence and cause a change even though they do not belong to any established institution of a state. The admission of non-state actors into the international relations theory rebukes the assumptions of realism and other black box theories of international relations, which argue that interactions between states are the main relationships of interest in studying international events.<sup>1</sup>

A Violent Non-State Actor (VNSA) is an organisation that uses illegal violence (i.e. force not officially approved of by the state) to reach its goals. Phil Williams, in an overview article, states that “VNSAs have become a persistent challenge to nation-states in the 21st century”.<sup>2</sup> In various parts of the world, VNSAs not only intimidate businesses, corrupt politicians and launder their proceeds, but also engage in a range of activities that defy and weaken state sovereignty. In most of the African countries as well as Central Asia and Afghanistan, warlords are major players in the political system and the economy. In Iraq, insurgents, terrorists, militias

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**N.B.** The views expressed in this article are those of the author in his personal capacity and do not carry any official endorsement.

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and criminal organisations operate in a common opportunity space, intersecting and overlapping in ways that make the restoration of a legitimate and effective central state particularly difficult.

VNSAs play a prominent, often destabilising role in nearly every humanitarian and political crisis faced by the international community.<sup>3</sup> As a new class of actors in international relations, VNSAs represent a departure from

the traditional Westphalian system of states in two ways: by providing an alternative to state governance and challenging the state's monopoly of violence. VNSAs develop out of poor state governance but also contribute to further undermining governance by the state. When weak states are unable to create or maintain the loyalty and allegiance of their populations, individuals and groups typically revert to, or develop, alternative patterns of affiliation. This causes the family, tribe, clan, etc. to become "the main reference points for political action, often in opposition to the state".<sup>4</sup>

### **Genesis and the Drivers of VNSAs**

In a sense, VNSAs have been around for millennia. Even Rome, at the height of its power, had to contend with roaming criminal bands that preyed on its citizens as well as with maritime pirates. During the 20th century, however, such groups were relatively insignificant, dwarfed by the process of state consolidation and the contest among powerful nation-states. VNSAs became a critical part of the decolonisation process, but this was essentially because they wanted to control the state themselves rather than being subservient to foreign and distant rulers. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, however, VNSAs have reemerged in large part because of the growing weakness of many states, that they seek to perpetuate and intensify. The notion of weak states, of course, is inherently relative. Perhaps the best way to understand contemporary states, therefore, is

in terms of a strong-weak continuum across certain key dimensions.<sup>5</sup>These include:

**Legitimacy:** The more legitimate the state, the more it relies on consent rather than coercion and on authority rather than power or brute force. In the absence of such legitimacy, loyalty and allegiance are typically directed elsewhere.<sup>6</sup>

**Capacity:** Strong and effective states have a significant extractive capacity but match this with the provision of collective goods ranging from the maintenance of security and order to health care and welfare. States that are highly extractive but do not match this with collective provision, are typically seen as exploitative – which undermines their legitimacy. States with capacity gaps tend to develop functional holes that offer opportunities to non-state actors.

**Collective Interest Vs Individual Interest:** An agreed notion of the collective interest of the state and its citizens constrains and restrains political competition. In states where this is present, procedural and substantive norms are widely accepted; although there is opportunity for the expression of individual and group interests within well-defined limits. In cases where individual interests take priority over the collective interest, corruption runs rife or the state becomes fragmented. When control of the state becomes the prize of politics, commitments to the shared interest are subordinated to the quest of individual or factional interests.

**Inclusiveness Rather than Exclusivity:** In effect, this indicates that “no group is excluded from seeking political manipulation or receiving a reasonable share of resources and services because of its affiliation” or its identity. The collective is truly comprehensive rather than partial. Minority populations are given full rights as citizens and treated with dignity. They are also full

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recipients of the collective goods provided by the state. On the other side, exclusion can be social, political or economic or, more often than not, a combination of all of these. While a degree of exclusion for some and preferential treatment for others might be unavoidable, when it becomes overly stark and pronounced, it can provoke insurrection or ethnic conflict.

In sum, strong states are characterised by high levels of legitimacy and authority, adequate levels of provision of collective commodities, sound economic supervision, the predominance of the collective, and a high grade of inclusiveness. In most cases, weak spots along the diverse dimensions are mutually reinforcing, while, in some cases, limitations in some areas are offset by strengths elsewhere. When there are multiple dimensions along which the state is weak, the prospects for the rise of VNSAs are considerably increased.<sup>7</sup>

### **Mathematics of Violence**

The Mercyhurst College Institute for Intelligence Studies (MCIIS), Pennsylvania, has conducted research and performed an analysis on the role of NSAs and their impact in Sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>8</sup>

**Indexes:** There are certain essential parameters which when converted to specific indexes can provide us with a near clear picture of the existence of a legitimate state. These have been created by agencies of international acclaim on a graduated scale. Indexes, thus, obtained are then converted to percentile coefficients. This analysis uses the 1-5 scale. Scores are then rounded to 0.5 depending on the level of accuracy of compared entities.

- *Ease of Doing Business by World Bank:* A high ranking on the ease of doing business index means the regulatory environment is

conducive to the operation of business. A low ranking indicates that the conditions are inhospitable to business minded NSAs and, thus, creates space for VNSAs to operate.

- *Transparency Index by Transparency International:* Countries with a low ranking indicate that VNSAs are likely to have greater influence in a country, and it would be unlikely that smaller businesses, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and ethical NSAs would have influence.
- *Human Development Index by UN Development Programme:* A country with a lower ranking is unlikely to create conditions for social, health and cultural oriented NGOs and NSAs to operate, thus, extends that space to VNSAs, and a country with a high ranking is likely to have many social, health and cultural oriented NGOs.
- *Freedom of the Press Index by Reporters Without Borders:* The media, as an NSA, is highly likely to have greater influence on a country with fewer restrictions on freedom of the press, except where the media is state controlled. Greater press freedom is also more likely to increase the numbers of different forms of media, which also increases the number of NSAs. A freer press also indicates more exposure to social humanitarian issues, which enhances the NGOs' abilities to raise funds. The media (press) often plays a huge role in insurgent activities. Regardless of the freedom of the press allowed, the media is often highly influential in insurgencies.
- *Civil Rights and Civil Liberties Score by Freedom House:* Countries with lower scores in the two categories are likely to interact with VNSAs that have a larger role and more influence in a state. Countries with higher scores that are partly free are likely to have fewer VNSAs, with decreasing influence.
- *Global Peace Index by The Economist Intelligence Unit:* Countries with higher rankings are more likely to have peaceful NSAs that contribute peacefully to the economy, culture, and politics. Countries with low

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rankings are more likely to have VNSAs, such as terrorist factions and criminal organisations.

▪ *Global Information Technology by the World Economic Forum*: Information technology not only enhances the potential for firms to open new outsourcing industries, but also increases the populace's exposure to foreign media, foreign ideologies, allows them to network with like-interested groups, etc. The information technology index has so many implications that it should be considered in specific contexts.

▪ *Economic Freedom by the Heritage*

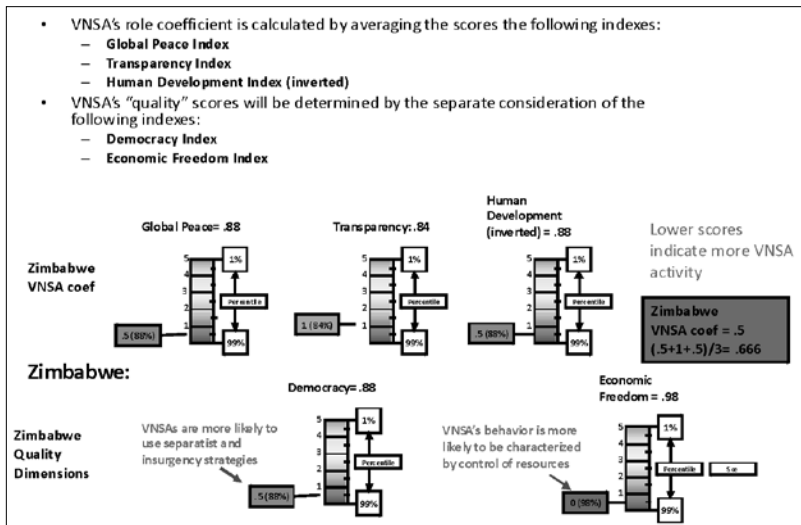
*Foundation and Wall Street Journal*: A free economy makes it highly likely for an NSA (particularly business) to have a greater role and influence in society. This means more influence, and greater numbers of NSAs. Countries with little or no economic freedom will mean fewer NSAs, and more power and influence in the hands of VNSAs (like ethnic groups).

- *Democracy Index by the Economist*: Free countries are likely to have more and varied NSAs, which will hold greater influence. Repressive countries will have fewer NSAs, which will have disproportionate influence in the state. Low scoring countries have less political participation outside the ranks of the ruling regime. Additionally, lower scores likely indicate that VNSAs will operate with higher freedom in order to disrupt the democratic systems.

The VNSAs' role coefficient is calculated by averaging the scores of the Global Peace Index, Transparency Index and Human Development Index (inverted). The VNSAs' "quality" scores will be determined by the separate consideration of the Democracy Index and Economic Freedom

Index. Graphical analysis of the operating space for VNSAs in Zimbabwe has been worked out and depicted in Fig 1 below.

**Fig 1: VNSAs in Zimbabwe**



Although the patterns of causation are not always clear, there is a correlation between state weakness and the emergence of one or another kind of VNSAs. States with low legitimacy, for example, are unable to create or maintain the loyalty and allegiance of their populations. In these circumstances, individuals and groups typically revert to, or develop, alternative patterns of affiliation. The result is often the creation of “no-go” zones or spaces in which VNSAs emerge as a form of alternative governance.<sup>9</sup>

### Force Multipliers for the Rise of VNSAs

VNSAs are inherently “illegitimate vis-à-vis the classical state system in part because the essence of being a state is having a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence.” Yet, they often provide alternative governance,

offering services and supplying collective goods that the state is unable or unwilling to offer and provide. In other words, VNSAs develop out of poor state governance but, in turn, further undermine governance by the state.

**Globalisation:** Another important factor in understanding the rise of VNSAs is globalisation. Not only has globalisation challenged individual state capacity to manage economic affairs, it has also provided facilitators and force multipliers for VNSAs. The global flows of arms, for example, are no longer under the exclusive control of states. Illicit arms dealers have become important transnational players. Arms dealers have contributed to a diffusion or democratisation of military power that has provided VNSAs with weapons capabilities that allow them to challenge government forces.

**Transnational Social Capital:** In a similar vein, globalisation has allowed VNSAs to develop what might be termed transnational social capital and to create alliances and generate support outside the immediate area of their operations. Globalisation, along with the rise of the illicit global economy, has also provided funding opportunities for VNSAs. For some groups, the proceeds derived from exploitation of these opportunities are an end in themselves; for others, the profits from illicit activities provide the funding that enables them to pursue political and military agendas. Whatever the exact nature of the group, however, it is clear that just as globalisation has, in some respects, diminished state control, it has also augmented and empowered VNSAs.<sup>10</sup> In effect, VNSAs often provide psychological empowerment for the disempowered, marginalised and disenfranchised. Moreover, several developments will feed the rise of VNSAs over the next several decades. Particularly important are urbanisation and demographic trends, most significantly a continued or even intensifying “youth bulge” in many developing countries.<sup>11</sup>

**Urbanisation:** This has multiple dimensions. One of the most important is the emergence of a small but growing number of mega-cities



with a population of over 20 million people. In the next decade or so, Tokyo, currently the only state in this category will be joined by Mumbai, Delhi, Mexico City, New York, Sao Paulo, Dhaka, Jakarta and Lagos. The sheer size of such cities will generate immense law and order and security problems, especially in poorer areas, and impose additional burdens on urban infrastructures that are already under stress. In some cases, these stresses and strains will prove overwhelming, leading to weak, failing and collapsed cities. By 2015, there will be 23 megacities, 19 of them in the developing world.<sup>12</sup>

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### **Spectrum of VNSAs**

Relatively few of the sovereign states represented in the United Nations can truly claim a monopoly of force within their territorial borders. This is a fundamental change that has been underappreciated as a global phenomenon partly because the violent challengers have taken different forms in different parts of the world. These forms include tribal and ethnic groups, criminal gangs, drug-trafficking organisations, warlords, militias, parallel militaries, insurgents, transnational terrorists.<sup>13</sup> In spite of some similarities among them, NSAs represent a great deal of heterogeneity. Some may have clearly defined political objectives, while this may be less clear-cut in other cases. Some may control territory and have established administrative structures parallel to, or instead of, those of the state, while others have loose command structures and weak control over members. Some operate in rural areas conducting guerrilla type warfare, while others are mainly urban phenomena. Some concentrate on attacking military targets, while others attack civilians as a matter of strategy. NSAs may be composed of men, women and children. In some groups, female members comprise an important percentage

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of combatants and other members. For instance, the National Liberation Army in Colombia has stated that it has close to 50 per cent female members.<sup>14</sup>

**Relationship with the State:** In many cases, these groups are challenging the state; in others they are cooperating and colluding with state structures; in some, the state is a passive bystander while they fight one another. In several instances, they are both fighting one another and confronting state structures that seek either to destroy them or to bring them under control. Despite their divergent forms, however, these VNSAs share certain characteristics. They also represent a common challenge to national and international security, a challenge that is far larger than the sum of the individual types of groups, and that is likely to increase rather than reduce over the coming decades. These groups are referred to as “para-states” since they are entities which challenge the state’s “monopoly on the use of violence within a specified geographical territory.” There are 387 such organisations.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, for VNSAs filling functional spaces is often even more important than filling territorial spaces.

**VNSAs in the Maritime Domain:** The maritime pirates also form part of VNSAs. Although there has been both a resurgence of piracy in recent years – especially in the seas off Somalia and West Africa – and a growth in its lethality, pirates for the most part are little more than a nuisance to global trade. The total estimated cost of Somalian piracy ranges from \$ 8.0-17.0 billion per year.<sup>16</sup> They rarely challenge state authority and legitimacy and, although their actions increase the prospect of some kind of maritime environmental disaster (for example, a collision in the Strait of Malacca), their significance is inherently limited.

As discussed above, some VNSAs use terror as a tactic. For terrorist organisations, the use of indiscriminate violence against civilian targets is not only central to their strategy but is also their defining characteristic. These groups seek political change through the use of violence. At the same time, terrorist organisations differ enormously in terms of origins and objectives. Each of the four waves of modern terrorism – anarchist, anti-colonial, left-wing and religious – has had its own set of militant organisations seeking change and using violence to bring it about.<sup>17</sup> Yet, the dominance of one kind of terrorist organisation does not mean the

absence of others. The successors of anti-colonial terrorist organisations, for example, are groups dissatisfied with the outcome of decolonisation, seeking national self-determination and see a terrorist campaign as the only way to achieve their objectives. When such groups have popular sympathy, a degree of legitimacy and some territorial control, they typically develop into an insurgency. Nevertheless, it is clear that in the early 21st century, the most dangerous terrorist organisations are not nationalist groups of this kind but rather groups rooted in militant Islam.

**“Robinhood” VNSAs:** Hamas and Hezbollah – unlike many terrorist groups which focus almost exclusively on attacks – have also provided services to key constituencies. In the Palestinian territories where poverty and corruption have been endemic, Hamas has stood out for its lack of corruption as well as its provision of schools and hospitals. The economic, social and health conditions in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are truly miserable, leaving a void that groups like Hamas are all too eager to fill.<sup>18</sup> In the event, Hamas proved so successful in filling some of the capacity gaps and functional holes that, in January 2006, it won a majority of

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seats in the Parliament. Similarly, in Lebanon, Hezbollah, which started as a militia, operates hospitals, clinics and schools and is heavily involved in the provision of social welfare and other services. Although Hamas and Hezbollah are clearly also terrorist organisations, their activities belie an exclusive label or identity of this kind and they have become major political players in their respective societies.

**LeT: Storming the World Stage:** Though the international community first began taking notice of the terrorist group Lashkar-e-Tayyeba (LeT) after its spectacular coordinated bombing and shooting attacks in Mumbai, India, in November 2008, the group was established in 1987 at a time when Pakistan was in the throes of Islamic turmoil. The LeT had an entrée to a steady intake of volunteers, funding, and—most important of all—resolute state support. Long sustained by Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Directorate, this Wahhabi group sponsors the vision of a universal Islamic caliphate through *tableegh* and *jihad*—preaching and armed struggle. Though India and Kashmir have been the LeT’s primary area of operations so far, the group has a disturbing existence internationally. It is apparent that after Al Qaeda, the LeT is the most dangerous terrorist group operating in South Asia. It is a dreadful and highly adaptable antagonist with an indisputably global reach and the ability to grow roots and sustain operations in countries far removed from its primary theatre of activity in South Asia. An attack could even reach US soil. The only reasonable objective for the US is the permanent evisceration of the LeT and other vicious South Asian terrorist groups—with Pakistani collaboration if feasible, but without it, if indispensable.<sup>19</sup>

Such examples notwithstanding, for the most part, terrorist organisations are the weakest of all the groups discussed here in terms of their challenge to state integrity and legitimacy. Driven by dissatisfaction with the status quo, most terrorist groups do not have the capacity to mount an insurgency campaign but seek to discredit the state and undermine its authority through provoking increasing repression in response to acts of

violence. At the same time, it also has to be acknowledged that there is sometimes a very thin line between terrorism and insurgency, in particular.

### **War for Self-Preservation**

In the summer of 2006, Israel attacked the positions of Hezbollah in Lebanon in retaliation for the kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers, at the peak of mutual hostilities. Most of the countries [including UN Security Council (UNSC) permanent members] accepted the right of Israel to protect itself from the attacks of Hezbollah.<sup>20</sup> The fact is that Hezbollah has not been under the control of the Lebanese state,<sup>21</sup> despite the fact that the political wing of Hezbollah participates actively in the political life of the country. Nevertheless, it is not a part of the armed forces of the country and, in fact, Hezbollah's arms remain one of the main troubles of present-day Lebanon. Consequently, the state is incapable of preventing its territory from being used by a non-state actor for initiating an attack on another country. Israel employed the reasoning that at a certain point, the Hezbollah actions reached a level where they represented an armed attack. The recognition of Israel's right to self-defence marks a departure from the "gravest" clause of the *Nicaragua* case.<sup>22</sup> In December 2008, the six-month lull between Israel and Gaza-based Hamas ended and after the firing of rockets by militant groups from Gaza, Israel ensued with a full-scale operation, entering Gaza and setting up a persistent aerial campaign. After three weeks of fighting, more than 1,000 Palestinians and 13 Israelis were left dead. This campaign triggered the most severe condemnation of Israel in Europe (both among politicians and academics), widespread criticism among the legal scholars around the world,<sup>23</sup> and probably cost Israel its best Middle Eastern ally – Turkey. When the conflict erupted, Gaza had been, for more than a year, under the control of Hamas and the Palestinian Authority from Ramallah had no power over the territory. On January 08, 2009, the UNSC passed Resolution 1860, which called for an instant ceasefire and Israel pulling out.

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When we look at the Israeli actions in Lebanon during the Second Lebanon War, it is apparent that Israel attacked sites in Lebanon which had nothing to do with Hezbollah. In particular, attacks against Beirut airport or dual-use infrastructure appear to be most problematic. Consent of the state towards the use of its territory by terrorists becomes in-and-of-itself an ample condition for the launch of large armed self-defence action. In the post-9/11 world, the two conditions that formerly divided – severity and state involvement – no longer need to be met.<sup>24</sup>

Israel's assault on Gaza in December 2008 is even more problematic, namely initiating unrestrained war after what could have been understood as 'mere frontier skirmishes' in the sense of the International Court of Justice's (ICJ's) Nicaragua judgment.<sup>25</sup> During the operation, Israel embattled much of the infrastructure which was of unambiguously civilian or dual-use nature.<sup>26</sup> Here, it must be stated that Hamas deliberately used mosques, hospitals and schools as shelters, warehouses and attack bases for its military-use equipment, also in deliberate violation of international law.<sup>27</sup> In response, Israel conducted aerial attacks in a densely-populated urban area, with the population density close to that of Manhattan. It is, therefore, debatable whether Israel's reaction fulfils the conditions of proportionality and distinction and whether all feasible measures to prevent human losses were taken.<sup>28</sup> The points are nevertheless clearly demonstrated – the fight against VNSAs in what can be understood as an international conflict bears the full scope of the norms of international humanitarian law and applies to both equally – the state as well as the non-state actor.

## **Challenges and Potential of Engaging VNSAs**

VNSAs present multiple challenges in the context of post-conflict peace building. First, the open-ended nature of the term defies a restrictive definition and, as such, gives rise to misunderstandings and tensions, as corporations find themselves branded in the same category as rebel groups, and the UN finds itself bracketed with parallel militaries. Second, there are the dual fears that engaging with VNSAs will legitimise the group and dilute the power of the state. Third, we have to realise that the international system remains state-centric and that working with non-state actors involves ‘swimming against the tide’, which is more concerned with state-building.<sup>29</sup> The goal of successful security governance in the context of post-conflict peace building should be the establishment of effective, transparent and democratically accountable state institutions. As measures complementary to the rebuilding of the state, efforts at constraining VNSAs, protecting vulnerable populations from abuse (or recruitment into non-state entities), and increasing respect for human rights, influencing VNSAs should be seen as an integral part of post-conflict peace building.<sup>30</sup>

## **Cyber Terrorism: The Crippling Punch**

The growing importance of cyber space to modern society, and its increasing use as a ground for clash, is becoming a national security anxiety for governments and armed forces globally. The special distinctiveness of cyber space, such as its asymmetric character, the lack of ascription, the low cost of ingress, the legal vagueness, and its role as an proficient medium for protest, crime, espionage and military aggression, makes it a lucrative domain for nation-states as well as non-state actors in a cyber conflict.<sup>31</sup> Although cyber space conflicts are preponderantly a non-state activity, they are drawing the consideration of those who wish to leverage them to endorse their own agendas. Cyber conflicts can be seen as a mirror of their real-world counterparts, but also increasingly

as completely independent disputes, clashes, attacks and perhaps acts of war in an emerging arena. In most cases, as we have seen, cyber actions involve various non-state actors. However, the overlapping gray-zone between these actor categories and legitimate state-backed cyber warriors is a source of concern since there is at present, no legal definition of cyber warfare, or agreement on what comprises an “act or war” in cyber space. It creates a window of opportunity for resource-limited actors who cannot prevail on a kinetic battlefield.<sup>32</sup>

Netwar, like cyber war describes a new spectrum of conflict that is emerging in the wake of the information revolution. Netwar consists of conflicts waged, on the one hand, by terrorists, criminals, gangs, and ethnic extremists; and by civil-society protesters [such as cyber activists or World Trade Organisation (WTO) advocates], on the other. What differentiates netwar is the networked organisational structure of its practitioners – with many groups actually being leaderless – and their speed in coming together in swarming attacks. They operate in small, dispersed units that can deploy nimbly—anywhere, anytime. They know how to penetrate and disrupt, as well as elude and evade. All feature network forms of organisation, doctrine, strategy, and technology, adjusted to the information age. The newer and less hierarchical groups (such as Hamas; the Palestinian Islamic Jihad; Hezbollah; Algeria’s Armed Islamic Group; the Egyptian Islamic Group; and Osama bin Laden’s terrorist network, Al Qaeda) have become the most active organisations. In these loosely organised groups with religious or ideological motives, operatives are part of a network that relies less on bureaucratic fiat and more on shared values and horizontal coordination mechanisms to accomplish its goals.<sup>33</sup>

As the ongoing “War on Terror” is slowly coming to an end, focus increasingly seems to be shifting towards the cyber arena. Terrorism as a phenomenon has most certainly not been eradicated, in Afghanistan or elsewhere, and as the next generation will be cyber-terrorists who are growing up with computers and smart phones, the occurrence of



cyber attacks of magnitudes greater than those previously witnessed, could be approaching.<sup>34</sup> In the other corner, the global defence industry is likely picking up the scent of significant military spending coming its way. This makes for an interesting, if perhaps somewhat disquieting development in the coming years, where one could probably only hope for a balanced and sensible approach from all the involved actors.

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The use of force against non-state actors is becoming more and more acceptable, not only in the Middle East, but also elsewhere in the world. It is often the case that states regress to armed force under the garb of self-defence. In this case, states are permitted to attack the non-state actor only in a restricted scope and are required to limit their activities only to the non-state actor and not to unrelated targets. Thus, the conduct of hostilities against non-state actors presents states with two main challenges – to limit their force and use it only against the non-state actor, and to differentiate who can be targeted and who cannot. There is no concurrence on either of the questions, as there is no conformity on who can be considered a combatant and who cannot. Only upcoming developments will show whether the international norms will move towards more restrictive or more permissive definitions of who can and who cannot be considered a combatant.

Post-9/11, the perception of the world about VNSAs has inexplicably changed. But the patterns of conflict are not unpredictable but discernable. Predominant and persistent irregular conflict challenges are arising from armed groups and other non-state actors, sometimes aided by authoritarian regimes, using irregular tactics and methods. These non-state and state actors are developing cooperative relationships ranging from *de facto coalitions to loose affiliations, magnifying the challenges they*

*pose*. They foster complex irregular conflict environments at the local, regional, and even global levels. The new paradigm of “war amongst the people” is based on the concept of a continuous criss-crossing between confrontation and conflict, regardless of whether a state is facing another state or a non-state actor. Rather than war and peace, there is no predicated sequence, nor is peace essentially either the starting point or the end point: conflicts are resolved, but not necessarily confrontations.<sup>35</sup> The environment generating these irregular challenges, the large number of weak and failing states, will not vanish any time soon.

## **Conclusion**

One of the most striking features of VNSAs is their sheer variety. This implies that there is some peril in bunching them together under a single block. Yet, it is clear from the preceding analysis that they do have certain things in common: they all emerge in reaction to inadequacies, deficiencies or shortcomings in many states and to one degree or another seek to compensate for those shortcomings. At the same time, there are significant variations in motivation, purpose, power structures and the like. One of the risks, however, is that they will increasingly form alliances with one another. The proliferation of non-state actors in the post-Cold War era has been one of the factors leading to the Cobweb Paradigm in international politics. Under this paradigm, the traditional Westphalian nation-state experiences an erosion of power and sovereignty, and non-state actors are part of the cause. There are unquestionable patterns of linkages between organised crime and terrorist networks, which create complex contours increasing the difficulty for nations to deal with VNSAs efficiently. Despite growing policy-oriented research in recent years, several aspects of VNSA engagement and the changing dynamics within the VNSA landscape remain unaddressed by international policies and programmes for fragile states. The sheer number and range of functions and overlaps between VNSAs, many of which are constantly changing

and adapting to unstable socio-political environments, pose extreme challenges to the more rigid boundaries of international aid architecture and donor expectations. More precisely, a combination of inappropriate policy frameworks, instruments and delivery methods inhibit engagement with the full spectrum of VNSAs that are relevant to a transition process.

At the same time, it is clear that a consequence of both the relative and absolute decline of the state is that those involved in national and international security in the 21st century will need to understand the threats from VNSAs. The reconciliatory talks of the USA with the Taliban, with the Haqqanis being part of the delegation, under political and economic compulsions comprise a big shift in the policy to engage VNSAs at the global level.<sup>36</sup> Over the last year, China has also been expanding its direct contacts with the Pakistan backed Taliban and sounding them out on security issues that range from separatist groups in the Chinese region of Xinjiang to the protection of Chinese resource investments. These trends apparently indicate the growing position of VNSAs and the decline of nation states in the emerging world power matrix. It also seems likely that some states will seek alliances with various VNSAs in an effort to advance their own interests. This phenomenon is likely to increase in frequency and significance over the next few decades. VNSAs will continue to challenge some states but will increasingly align with others to create a complex and confusing set of geopolitical and organisational rivalries that will often prove difficult to disentangle.

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