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The Emergence of Feral and Criminal Cities: U.S. Military Implications in a Time of Austerity

Robert J. Bunker

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The Institute of Land Warfare
ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES ARMY

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LAND WARFARE PAPER NO. 99W, April 2014

The Emergence of Feral and Criminal Cities: U.S. Military Implications in a Time of Austerity

by Robert J. Bunker

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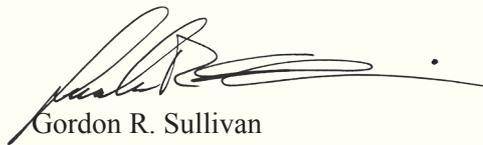
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Foreword

Modern military thinking is typically focused at the state level of analysis due to the influence of realism and other traditional international relation theories. Within these theories, nonstate threats are of little to no concern and the spread of economic liberalism across the globe, via globalized capitalism, is viewed as a positive outcome of the post-Cold War era. One could be led to believe that the early 21st century is indeed the time of the modern democratic state—a model derived from Western values including the equality of peoples and genders, mass political enfranchisement and laissez-faire economics.

Recent events, however, suggest that setbacks are increasingly occurring to this enlightened view of the world’s collective political future. Pushbacks by autocratic regimes are now taking place; power vacuums are developing in once autocratic states, resulting in attempts by organized crime and other violent nonstate actors to dominate the local landscape. Continued U.S. governmental budgetary dysfunction and the growing wealth disparities between the haves and have-nots of the world—with increasing economic strains on our middle and lower classes—also are causes of concern. Last but not least of these setbacks is, of course, the severe downsizing of U.S. Army and sister military forces—the protective sword and shield of the world’s democracies—as a new age of austerity is being forced on our governmental institutions and agencies.

The author takes the contrarian view—in line with the elements of dark globalization he sees developing—regarding the nature of the emerging global security environment. Derived from city-level analysis—one in which both feral and criminal cities may come about—his argument centers around a world inhabited by numerous belligerent nonstate threats, a world that is increasingly becoming “toxic” to the values and institutions of the modern democratic state. Within such a worldview, he sees nation-building, as was attempted in Iraq and Afghanistan, as presently impossible. Further, even city-building may now be beyond our limited resources and capabilities. Rather, he suggests more limited policy objectives and operations be conducted in the use of our military forces and subsequent governmental interagency efforts. That is, they must presently focus on a “boots on the ground” approach only to “render safe” the targeted strategic and operational environment in which are our troops are deployed. The unique strategic perspective offered, U.S. military implications identified and conclusions reached in this paper most certainly warrant our further reflection and discussion.



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14 April 2014

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The Emergence of Feral and Criminal Cities: U.S. Military Implications in a Time of Austerity

Introduction

Much has been written in recent years about the triumph of neoliberalism, the end of history, the win-win economics of globalism and other optimistic proclamations concerning the world's collective political future. While the modern democratic state has prospered and replicated itself across much of the globe since 1900, it is increasingly feeling various forms of pressure on its social and political form of organization.¹ With this in mind, due diligence dictates that we should balance such unbridled optimism about contemporary and emerging democratic states with some healthy pessimism.

A recent example of such exuberance can be found in "Mexico Makes It," an article that appeared in the March/April 2013 issue of *Foreign Affairs*:²

[M]odern Mexico is a middle-class country. The World Bank estimates that some 95 percent of Mexico's population is in the middle or upper class. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) also puts most of Mexico's population on the upper rungs, estimating that 50 percent of Mexicans are middle class and another 35 percent are upper class. . . .³

Today, Mexico has a vibrant and fiercely independent press, led by publications such as *El Universal*, *Reforma* and *La Jornada*. With the proliferation of social media and with information now publicly available through Mexico's freedom of information law, passed in 2002, Mexican civil-society organizations and individual voters can criticize and shame corrupt bureaucrats and politicians.⁴

While the rise of Mexico with its globalized economy and democratic reforms is counter-balanced with some mention of corruption and cartel violence plaguing that state, on the whole the essay reads more like a governmental press release. To add insult to injury concerning the glossing of Mexican cartel and gang violence and the loss of political control of regions (i.e., areas of impunity), the new Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) administration of President Enrique Peña Nieto has now instituted a blackout of press coverage on such negative forms of reporting.⁵ It was bad enough when the criminal insurgents in Mexico were terrifying the free press (including bloggers) in order to shut down their reportage of beheadings, dismemberments and other cartel atrocities. This new governmental censorship policy will serve only to further break the trust of the Mexican people, who were expecting so much more with democratization.

Half a world away and a decade earlier, President George W. Bush—in May 2003 in a nationally televised speech from the flight deck of the aircraft carrier USS *Abraham*

Lincoln—proclaimed that “major combat operations in Iraq have ended.”⁶ This exultation also signified an overly optimistic political vision of the future. In hindsight, such operations against a third-tier conventionally armed state were the easy part of the conflict; what came next was an entirely different matter. Instead, we witnessed rampant terrorism and insurgency, constant suicide bombings, improvised explosive device (IED) ambushes and urban combat against foreign fighters so high on narcotics they forgot to drop after being mortally wounded.⁷ For our trouble, about \$1.7 trillion of the current U.S. national debt of \$16.7 trillion can be attributed to direct Iraqi war costs, with the eventual costs projected in the \$4–6 trillion range after debt interest is factored into the equation.⁸ U.S. campaigns in Afghanistan, in turn, brought their own additional national expenditure burdens.

On the grand strategic level, the commonality between the situations in contemporary Mexico and Iraq is startling. We are also seeing the same process now taking place in Libya, Egypt and Syria. While Afghanistan does not fall within the same initial autocratic regime parameters, the back end of the conflict also follows a similar path.⁹ Essentially, what we are witnessing is the demise of autocratic regimes initiated via either external or internal political change. This change may be initially peaceful—as in a Mexico that is attempting to liberalize and democratize; however, it is typically violent in nature and requires direct invasion, as in Iraq, and varying levels of rebellion and conflict, as seen in the Arab Spring countries of Libya, Egypt and Syria.

Once the former autocratic regimes have been mortally weakened (if not fully excised) in these states, two basic futures for such states exist. The first is that of the promise of democratic process, universal suffrage, equality of the sexes, freedom of religion, a free and independent press and the many other benefits of 21st century Western civilization. This is the upside of the globalization of laissez-faire economics—the birth of new democratic and liberal states. The other future is that of the promise of varying degrees of neo-barbarism, privatized violence and atrocity, illicit economic activities and state partition by nonstate forces belonging to a bewildering array of gangs, criminal organizations, terrorist and insurgent groups, private militias and other forms of violent nonstate actors (VNSAs).¹⁰ The breakup and political partition of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s was definitely a harbinger of things to come concerning the future trajectories upon which the peoples of former autocratic states would someday find themselves.

The U.S. Army has experienced the specter of dark globalization firsthand with its operations of the last decade in Iraq and Afghanistan, first while rendering these states “safe for U.S. interests” and then trying to support the establishment of the institutions of democratic states as part of the nation-building process. Prior to those more recent campaigns, the stabilization of states to mitigate the effects of human suffering generated by state failure, or even attempts to stave it off, have been undertaken. Typically, the context provided for such military operations—which can be defined by a multitude of terms such as operations-other-than-war, counterinsurgency, peacekeeping and peace enforcement, and stability and support—is viewed at the level of the state. We consistently look at these issues from the levels of “state failure,” “nation-building” and “regime change.”

Rather than from a statist perspective, we should consider that states are increasingly comprised of their major urban centers, as this is where the populace is migrating. Major cities, and in numerous instances the slums accompanying them, are where the political center of gravity is now shifting. This urbanization process is found in states with democratic and autocratic systems alike. For instance, in 1950, a total of 86 cities each had a population over one million. This figure is expected to rise to well past 400 such cities by the mid-2000s, with one

target projection of 550 cities by 2015.¹¹ These large cities and even larger megacities—some presently with urban footprints in the low twenty millions—not only represent concentrations of humanity but also concentrations of scientific, economic and political power.¹² At the same time, however, they represent potential gravity wells of instability—predominantly in the Global South—with their billions of urban poor who represent the unwashed masses, destitute slum-dwelling sub-renters and squatters.¹³

Increasingly, where cities go, so do states; that is, if cities and their populations are vibrant and healthy, so will be the gestalt represented by the state.¹⁴ On the other hand, failed cities—or, even worse, ones that have become criminalized—portend a very different state trajectory. States manifesting such cities, rather than simply falling into chaos, make for very different and unexpected nation- (and city-) building challenges. With this in mind, this monograph will provide an overview and analysis of contemporary feral and criminal research.¹⁵ It will then highlight the present plight of the United States, derived from the lack of political consensus and the new age of economic austerity that our nation is facing. These will mean that our ability to mitigate and respond to feral and criminal city emergence will be increasingly degraded. The U.S. military implications and a conclusion are then provided which suggest that how we use our national military force, especially “boots on the ground,” and what we can realistically achieve in our foreign campaigns needs to be both reevaluated and scaled back.

Feral and Criminal Cities Research

In 2003, Richard J. Norton published the essay “Feral Cities” in the *Naval War College Review*. This was updated in his 2010 work “Feral Cities: Problems Today, Battlefields Tomorrow?” in the inaugural issue of the *Marine Corps University Journal*.¹⁶ Baseline perceptions and definitions concerning feral cities from 2003 and 2010 are as follows:

The putative “feral city” is (or would be) a metropolis with a population of more than a million people in a state the government of which has lost the ability to maintain the rule of law within the city’s boundaries yet remains a functioning actor in the greater international system.¹⁷

A feral city is a metropolis in a nation-state where the government has lost the ability to maintain the rule of law within the city’s boundaries. These cities nevertheless remain connected to the greater international system through such avenues as trade and communication. The most immediately recognizable example of such a city is present-day Mogadishu, Somalia.¹⁸

Derived from a diagnostic tool, cities are evaluated to determine their ferality level, spanning the green level with no danger of ferality taking place through the yellow level which is marginal in nature and then through the red level which signifies that a city is becoming feral. Cities themselves are viewed as a patchwork of these colors initially based on 12 measurements, later increased to 15 (see table 1). At any given point in time, the mosaic of these colors results in a dominant color being assigned to a city. Category blurring and other methodological concerns were evident in the two Norton documents. Of note is the fact that the initial schema was moderated by political conservatism with the construct ending at the third (red) level of a city becoming feral but not actually being feral. A list of red level (becoming feral) cities was provided in Norton’s essays: Johannesburg (2003), Mogadishu (2003, 2010), Fallujah (2010), Gaza City (2010), Lagos (2010), New Orleans (2010), Nuevo Laredo (2010), Rio de Janeiro (2010), Rosarito Beach (2010) and São Paulo (2010).¹⁹

Table 1: No Danger, Marginal and Becoming Feral City Levels²⁰

	Green level (no danger)	Yellow level (marginal)	Red level (becoming feral)
Governance	Enacts effective legislation. Appropriately directs resources. Controls events in all portions of the city, day and night. Corruption detected and punished.	Exercises only patchwork or diurnal control. Highly corrupt.	At best, has only negotiated zones of control. At worst, does not exist.
Economy	Robust. Significant foreign investment. Provides goods and services. Provides a stable and adequate tax base.	Limited or no foreign investment. Subsidized or decaying industries. Growing deficits. Most foreign investment is quickly removable.	Local subsistence industries or industries based on illegal commerce. Some legitimate business interests may be present, based on profit potential.
Services	Complete range of services, including educational and cultural, available to all city residents.	Can manage minimum level of public health, hospital access, potable water, trash disposal.	Intermittent to nonexistent power and water. Those who can afford to will privately contract or allow nongovernmental organization to provide.
Security	Well-regulated, professional police forces. Response to wide spectrum of requirements.	Little regard for legality/human rights. Police often matched/stymied by criminal “peers.”	Nonexistent. Security is attained through private means or paying protection.
Civil Society	Rich and robust. Constructive relationships with government.	Relationships with government are confrontational. Civil societal organizations fill governmental voids.	Civil society fractured along clan/ethnic/other lines. Local elites in control. Security-oriented civil society organizations may be criminal.

Another writer on this topic is Matthew Frick, who wrote on the subject of “Feral Cities—Pirate Havens” in a 2008 issue of *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*.²¹ While that essay broadened the construct to include coastal pirate cities, it did not fundamentally modify or enhance the initial theory. Feral city theorizing remained predominately within the U.S. sea services journals until 2011²² with the publication of an essay by this author and John Sullivan expanding the ferality construct into the purple and black levels in the academic journal *Small Wars & Insurgencies*.²³ These levels took the construct over the “political precipice” by actively stating that a fourth (purple) level—in which a city witnesses total institutional failure and becomes fully feral—and a fifth (black) level, in which a city reinstitutionalizes around criminal values, exist. While the original Norton construct initially viewed a city failing into ferality (chaos and institutional debonding) as the worst-case scenario, this new schema viewed the rise of the anticity—a city reconstituted around postmodern criminality—as a far greater security threat

to the Westphalian state.²⁴ This new construct was further integrated into the evolutionary gang and cartel writings of Bunker and Sullivan. These writings, like those by other scholars focusing on various forms of violent nonstate actors (VNSAs), are chronicling the contemporary shift from criminals to criminal–soldiers and from less sophisticated criminal–soldiers to more advanced and deadlier forms.²⁵

The purple and black levels are summarized in table 2. The purple (fully feral) level is viewed as an unstable Hobbesian condition which, if prolonged, will result first in the death of the constituent communities and eventually the city itself. An example of the early effects of this process is evident in cities such as Detroit and St. Louis where neighborhoods have either been abandoned and then bulldozed or used as firebreak corridors to protect the business and tourist districts, respectively.²⁶ Presently Cape Town, the epitome of high rates of crime, in a country which has over 400,000 private security personnel—double that of police officers—is another city with increasing ferality within its environs.²⁷

The fifth or black level is that of the criminal city. While thought to be typically an accidental occurrence—via de facto politicalization of a cartel or other criminal entity to fill the vacuum of governance created due to compromised state institutions—premeditated forms derived from some of the more organized criminal insurgent groups represent another potentiality. Examples of criminalized cities include Nuevo Laredo and Ciudad del Este. Such cities are no longer ours (i.e., belonging to sovereign states) but theirs (i.e., belonging to criminal organizations and networks), configured around the illicit economy for their revenue streams.²⁸ While these cities may also partake in licit and informal economic activities, essentially blurring them with their illicit economic underpinnings, their new suzerains are hostile to the intent of neoliberal developmental and investment programs. While willing to accept Western governmental and private aid monies, the rulers of criminal enclaves and cities will pocket those monies for the private enrichment of themselves, their families and clans and their retainers.

This body of still relatively new feral and criminal city writings and supporting scholarship in other facets of dark globalization, including those focusing on the increasing size of the illicit economy and evolving forms of violent nonstate actors, portend numerous negative implications for the modern democratic state. These include, but are not limited to, strains being placed on the formal economy from which states draw their revenue lifelines, a crisis of ideology and religious belief with an accompanying rise in spiritual deviance (e.g., barbarism and even instances of human sacrifice)³⁰ in areas where state militaries are deployed, and indigenious (urban) populations which have a stake in maintaining the status quo. As the latter typically benefits both licit and illicit local elites, these thus block any attempts at the implementation of Western development models.

The Present Plight of the United States

Given the United States' unique position as the undisputed leader of the free world following our victories in World War II and the Cold War, one would expect that its government would be in an envious economic position and functioning smoothly. This would provide us with a strong foundation from which to militarily and economically respond to the requirements needed to contend with threats emanating from feral and criminal cities—and possibly even turn around some of these cities themselves by means of aid and economic development programs.

This, however, is far from the case. While we presently enjoy overwhelming conventional and power-projection capability and predominance, and have even begun to emerge from recession, the apex of our military power has now passed. With upward momentum halted, we

Table 2: Fully Feral and Criminal City Levels²⁹

	Purple level (fully feral)	Black level (beyond feral; criminal city)
Governance	Does not exist. Extortion of monies, goods and services replaces taxation. Localized control by street gangs, cartels, private armies and warlords.	Legislation and policy based on strongman rule and personal whims. Taxation replacing extortion. Resources directed without the consent of the governed. Controls events in all portions of the city, day and night. Corruption is the system.
Economy	Illegal commerce and industries dominate. Barter system in effect. Legitimate business interests, if present, based on high profit potential and heavily armed/have made alliance with criminal groups.	Active. Some foreign investment. Goods and services, both legitimate and illicit, openly provided. Illicit revenues from criminal activities supplemented by tax base (developing).
Services	Highly erratic to nonexistent services. Those who can afford to will privately contract or establish own services (e.g., generators/wells). Most nongovernmental organization providers have left.	Services, including educational and cultural, available to city residents who are loyal/contracted to the criminal government.
Security	Nonexistent. Total collapse of police forces and judiciary. Security is attained through private means, paying protection and rise of militias/fortified enclaves. Widespread use of mercenaries.	Reasonable levels of security provided in public spaces. Police forces (mafia in uniform) provide internal security for ruling autocrats.
Civil Society	Civil society in ongoing conflict between clans/ethnic/other lines. Most local elites have fled. Written press no longer exists. Security-oriented civil society organizations are criminal.	Total shift in value systems to criminal (narco). Spirituality is death/greed-based. The strong prey upon the weak; women are disenfranchised.

have stalled and will soon begin to feel the effects of military decline. No relief to our present plight can be expected unless we can overcome a number of impediments to our system of governance:

- Lack of consensus in Congress:** For decades now, the polarization between the political right and the political left in this nation has become increasingly exacerbated. Part of this problem may stem from the fact that the families of the representatives from the opposing parties now infrequently live in the Washington, DC area and no longer bond with one another as in years past; this had helped to bring some civility to the political process. Regardless of cause, this philosophical schism on how “governmental monies should be allocated for societal goods” has resulted in political gridlock and an inability for budgetary compromise. The 1 March 2013 sequestration order with its \$85 billion cuts package, while in many ways a new low point in this process, is part of the ongoing dysfunction of U.S. governance.³¹

- Increasing public (and family) debt:** Stemming from the simple inability of the U.S. government to bring in more than it spends, public debt has been mounting and, as before mentioned, now stands at \$16.7 trillion. This represents about 106 percent of the present U.S. Gross Domestic Product of \$15.66 trillion (2012 estimate).³² While fingers are readily pointed at the reasons for these high debt levels—too much money going to entitlements, guns (defense), butter (social welfare) or even to waste and fraud—the result is the same. Further, public debt servicing presently accounts for \$359.8 billion or 14.5 percent of the Fiscal Year (FY) 2013 federal budget outlays of \$2.469 trillion. The severity of this situation is better understood when public debt servicing is combined with the FY 2013 budget deficit of \$1.327 trillion; the aggregate amount of \$1.69 trillion means that 68 percent of the present budget is negatively influenced by debt servicing and new public debt.³³ Individual family debt and lack of savings issues are of additional concern with about 46.7 percent of U.S. households holding an average credit card balance of about \$15,257. Further, the bottom 50 percent of U.S. households presently hold only about 1.1 percent of the nation’s wealth if limited household equity, furnishings and other factors such as vehicles are taken into consideration.³⁴
- Dwindling economic resources:** The strain of the ongoing public debt load in tandem with a combination of governmental overcommitment to various domestic and foreign obligations and an inability to bring in more revenues is beginning to take its toll. The fiscal tricks of currency manipulation, the selling of public debt and creative accounting can serve only to stave off the day of economic reckoning. Of note is that while public and private (middle and lower income family) resources are constrained, U.S. corporations held a record level of cash on hand—\$1.45 trillion—as of 31 December 2012, with the bulk of it held in overseas accounts which the U.S. government is unable to tax as profits.³⁵ This further illustrates the fact that a sovereign free (off the U.S. books) economy is developing which highlights our inability to extract economic resources from it. When coupled with the growing illicit economy which we are expending revenues to combat, such as in the case of drug trafficking, we are not only passively losing revenue but also sustaining high levels of cash “burn rates” to mitigate some of the darker effects of globalization.
- Process over performance:** When bureaucracies run efficiently, they provide an industrial-type process with ongoing and measured governmental outputs much like those of a factory production line. The outputs themselves can be measured for their tangible and real-world value and impact. The condition we now have in the United States is very different. We are seeing the multiplication of risk-adverse bureaucracies with zero tolerance for failure. Such agencies and institutions fear any form of allegation of scandal or impropriety being leveled against them and, as a result, grind to a halt in their activities. Such bureaucracies measure success by engaging in the process of appearing busy, focusing on the process rather than actual performance outputs. Success quickly becomes defined by engagement in endless meetings with no decision or resolution of an issue taking place. Ultimately, dogma and ritual replace any form of operational relevance in the day-to-day activities of such organizations.

If the above impediments were not so serious, the situation in which the United States now finds itself could be likened to a group of lemmings going over a cliff. Death is by myopia and incrementalism—U.S. elected officials walking in lock step to their (and our) demise. This, sadly, is the nature of contemporary American politics, with short-term benefits taking

precedence over the long-term good of the nation. We presently appear to have an excess of politicians and a dearth of statesmen. While the democratic process is meant to be inefficient in order to preserve civil liberties and provide for a system of checks and balances, all citizens agree that something is very much wrong with the current political process in Washington and that this affliction has existed for some time now.

U.S. Military Implications

Derived from the preceding analysis, the constitution of the modern democratic state—its physical strength, its health—should at least be questioned if not openly accepted as somewhat clouded. Additionally, the global environment in which the modern democratic state resides appears to be becoming increasingly “toxic” to its values, institutions and economic and military foundations. To further complicate matters, the United States is now entering the downslope of its power curve, with no fix or reform in sight for the foreseeable future. If these developments are indeed the case, then a contrarian view of what is achievable and what is prudent in the conduct of certain forms of U.S. foreign military operations is warranted. With this consideration in mind, four military implications will be highlighted and discussed. Of benefit to the reader is the fact that these military implications can be placed in recent context—as an outcome of the many lessons learned for more than a decade now stemming from U.S. deployments into Iraq and Afghanistan and subsequent drawdowns:

- **Nation-building (and possibly even city-building) is presently impossible.** In line with recent experiences in Iraq and especially in Afghanistan, the proposition of bringing democratic governance to formerly autocratic and criminalized states that have been invaded and occupied by the United States is now simply untenable. While the post-World War II occupations of Western Germany and Japan provide the archetypical examples of success in this regard, they must now be considered historical anachronisms. Even the more recent successful integration of some of the former Soviet bloc states into the European Union can no longer be considered the present norm. Additionally, such operations greatly deplete our national treasure—the direct U.S. cost during the nation-building phase of post-May 2003 Iraq for military operations alone exceeded \$650 billion.³⁶ If that were not enough, the ill-fated U.S. attempts at nation-building in Afghanistan represent nothing more than one of history’s greatest multibillion-dollar mega-lottery wins for the Hamid Karzai family and extended clan.
- **Crime and war, licit and illicit are all the same.** As states fragment and their sovereign prerogatives diminish, the institutional and bureaucratic distinctions between crime and war, public and private and licit and illicit activities and domains erode and break down. Not only do these gray-area or crime-war operational environments confound U.S. military responses but, possibly even more important, they provide a strong inhibitor to U.S. attempts at nation- (and city-) building derived from foreign and private aid programs. This is no clearer than in regions where narcotics and other illicit economy activities dominate. Attempting to substitute low-profit licit industries and enterprises as a component of the nation-building process is presently futile—high-profit narcotics trafficking and the ensuing governmental corruption that goes with it are almost impossible to mitigate.³⁷
- **Boots on the ground are deployed only to render safe.** With any form of nation- or city-building out of the question and the operational environment into which our Soldiers deployed chaotic in nature and devoid of clear distinctions between soldiers and criminals

or legitimate and illicit economies, the mission that we give our forces is required to be both limited and selective in its objectives. When our Soldiers' boots are on the ground, they should be part of an offensive operation and should remain in country only to render the situation safe for well-defined U.S. national interests—first and foremost, to ensure that the homeland is no longer threatened. Our troops should be committed only as part of a proportional escalation regime; mission creep, or what we can term “unwarranted 21st century foreign entanglement,” needs to be avoided at all costs.

- **We need to make better use of proxies and armed “toasters.”**³⁸ Our Soldiers (and Marines) are some of the best trained and equipped troops in the world today. They are also very expensive to put into the field and sustain once committed to an operation. Given the built-in austerity in our future military budgets, we will be required to do more with less. Following a “hamburger helper” logic, we can extend the capability of our national forces by drawing upon select auxiliaries from allied foreign nations (with a lower per-soldier cost basis) and increasingly using robots, not only as armed drones but as defensive gun turrets and mobile fighting platforms (both of which can be manned by tele-operators who are offshore or back in the United States).³⁹

Conclusions

This monograph has shown that the literature focusing on the emergence of feral and criminal cities has real-world military implications. Further, when coupled with the present plight of the United States as defined by the current impediments to our system of governance, a “double whammy” situation is now taking place. The implications are that, when engaging in U.S. foreign military operations, nation-building (and potentially even city-building) is not presently tenable. Rather than attempting to engage in such an endeavor (and the concurrent counterinsurgency strategy integrated to support it), the desired end state of simply rendering a vanquished state or city safe may now be “good enough” for U.S. basic national security policy requirements.

Further, since the distinctions between crime and war, public and private and licit and illicit activities and domains are blurring, we should deploy troops on the ground in “render safe” operations only. When our troops are deployed, allied auxiliaries and armed robots should be fielded in support of them. In a time of increasing U.S. budgetary austerity and the growing criminalization of various regions of the globe, especially in the Western Hemisphere, a shepherding of U.S. national treasure is not only practical but strategically prudent.

While the above observations and their implications provide sound guidance for foreign (away from the continental United States) military operations, the threat of feral and criminal cities and enclaves emerging near our borders, and potentially within them, is an entirely different matter.⁴⁰ In various cities in Mexico that border the United States, such as Tijuana and Ciudad Juarez, it is imperative that federal (sovereign) political authority be maintained. The same goes for regions of the northern Mexican countryside that contain numerous small towns and villages. In both these complex urban and more rural environments, federal Mexican operations have taken place and are presently taking place.⁴¹ Further, concern exists domestically within the United States that in certain areas community failure may lead to city ferality, if not criminal takeover, of some urban enclaves. While such concerns may presently sound far-fetched, Chicago is undergoing a shooting gang war on the streets over drug distribution (tied into the Mexican cartels) and in American society we are increasingly witnessing the

polarization of wealth between the wealthy haves and the have-nots, with a diminishing white-collar and professional class caught in the middle.⁴²

As a result, the rise of feral and criminal cities and enclaves near and within the United States should be afforded a priority response. While the mandate to directly mitigate and respond to such scenarios is outside of the U.S. Army (and Marines and Special Forces) purview, these armed services and commands should at the very least be cognizant of such threats and, if required, how they can provide training and other forms of support, as U.S. Army North is presently doing with the Mexican government.⁴³

Getting back to warfighting and combat issues, ultimately, we do not want to eventually find ourselves in Ralph Peters' prophetic situation where indeed we must deploy "our soldiers into their cities," but this is increasingly a potential reality in many regions of the globe.⁴⁴ If some of these expeditions and operations must be launched, we must now recognize the fact that we may be unable presently to take these cities and make them ours, any more than we could enter Afghanistan or Iraq and bring the "light of Western civilization" to these far-off nations with their own tribal customs, religions and other culture-specific institutions and patterns of human existence.⁴⁵ At best, we should contain and neutralize—render safe—as cheaply as possible from a national military power perspective the nonstate threats that arise.⁴⁶

Endnotes

- ¹ Michael W. Doyle, chapter 3, “Liberalism and foreign policy,” *Foreign Policy: Theories, Actors, Cases*, Steve Smith, Amelia Hadfield, Tim Dunne, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 53; see map 3.1, “Liberal republics in 1900 and 2000.”
- ² Shannon K. O’Neil, “Mexico Makes It: A Transformed Society, Economy and Government,” *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 92, no. 2, March/April 2013, pp. 52–63.
- ³ *Ibid.*, p. 55. These are straw man statistics—85–95 percent of Mexico’s population is not middle and upper class. This would provide it with a standard of living much greater than that of the United States. The author finishes the paragraph with “Even the most stringent measurement, comparing incomes alongside access to health care, education, social security, housing and food, finds that just over 45 percent of Mexicans are considered poor—meaning that almost 55 percent are not.” While this is meant to provide some balance to the initial claims, the intent of the passage is to focus on the initial overly optimistic statement that “modern Mexico is a middle-class country.”
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 58. While increasing press freedoms are noted for some time now, the cartels and other organized crime groups have systematically targeted the press in Mexico. A review of sites such as the Committee to Protect Journalists (www.cpj.org) and the Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas (<http://knightcenter.utexas.edu>) provide an ongoing account of the violence directed against individual journalists, newspapers and television stations. In a number of the states in Mexico, media outlets are either self-censoring or no longer reporting on any stories of cartel violence or the corruption of public officials.
- ⁵ The Mexican governmental news blackout has been increasingly commented upon by bloggers at *Borderland Beat*. This author has been tracking cartel incidents on a daily basis for some years now and has also noticed a significant drop in reportage. See also the statement by Guadalupe Correa-Cabrera, chair of the Government Department at the University of Texas at Brownsville on the media blackout in Idefonso Ortiz, “‘Four trucks filled with bodies’ after Reynosa firefight,” *The Monitor*, 11 March 2013, http://www.themonitor.com/news/local/article_68fe5340-8aaf-11e2-ae7d-001a4bcf6878.html. The Mexican Office of the Attorney General will also no longer be providing information even on which cartels are in existence; see “Mexican government seals cartel information for twelve years,” *Borderland Beat*, 7 April 2013, <http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2013/04/mexican-government-seals-cartel.html> (English translation of a *Proceso* article). Further, while Mexico’s freedom of information law is all well and good on the surface, its implementation is a different matter. Further, attempting to shame corrupt bureaucrats and politicians—especially those tied to the cartels—may usher in personal safety concerns to oneself and one’s family.
- ⁶ “Bush calls end to ‘major combat,’” *CNN*, 2 May 2003, <http://www.cnn.com/2003/world/meast/05/01/sprj.iqr.main>.
- ⁷ The use of illicit narcotics by nonstate (criminal) soldiers is pervasive; see Paul Rexton Kan, *Drug Intoxicated Irregular Fighters: Complications, Dangers and Responses* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, March 2008).
- ⁸ Daniel Trotta, “Iraq war costs U.S. more than \$2 trillion: study,” *Reuters*, 14 March 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/03/14/us-iraq-war-anniversary-idUSBRE92D0PG20130314>.
- ⁹ Afghanistan was a bona fide criminal state—in that instance, a radical Islamist one—captured by the Taliban, who provided sanctuary to al Qaeda.
- ¹⁰ This contingency is already being planned for in Syria. See Ken Dilanian and Brian Bennett, “CIA sizes up Syria radicals for drone hits,” *Los Angeles Times*, 16 March 2013, pp. A1, A6.

- ¹¹ United Nations Secretariat, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2001 Revision* (New York: United Nations, 2002), <http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/wup2001/wup2001dh.pdf>; cited in Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums* (London: Verso, 2006). For new figures, see *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2011 Revision* at <http://esa.un.org/unup>.
- ¹² This is based on the old trading city model of the eastern Mediterranean; see Philip Mansel, “We are all Levantines now,” *Le Monde diplomatique*, April 2012, p. 16.
- ¹³ For works on this topic, refer to Davis, *Planet of Slums*, and Robert Neuwirth, *Shadow Cities: A Billion Squatters, A New Urban World* (New York: Routledge, 2006).
- ¹⁴ A body of literature exists on urban health. See, for example, Sandro Galea and David Vlahov, eds., *Handbook of Urban Health: Populations, Methods and Practice* (New York: Springer, 2005) and Nicholas Freudenberg, Sandra Galea and David Vlahov, eds., *Cities and the Health of the Public* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2006). To better understand the effects of urban terrorism derived from political and criminal organizations on the populations of cities, see Robert J. Bunker and Pamela L. Bunker, “Urban Terrorism,” *Urban Health: Global Perspectives*, David Vlahov et al., eds. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), pp. 191–205.
- ¹⁵ Other avenues of city- and security-centric research are also taking place. See the Cities in Conflict series at the openDemocracy website, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/cities-in-conflict>.
- ¹⁶ Richard J. Norton, “Feral Cities,” *Naval War College Review*, vol. 65, no. 4, Autumn 2003, pp. 97–106, and Richard J. Norton, “Feral Cities: Problems Today, Battlefields Tomorrow?” *Marine Corps University Journal*, vol. 1, no. 1, Spring 2010, pp. 51–77.
- ¹⁷ Norton, “Feral Cities,” 2003, p. 98.
- ¹⁸ Norton, “Feral Cities: Problems Today,” 2010, p. 51.
- ¹⁹ Norton, “Feral Cities,” 2003, and “Feral Cities: Problems Today,” 2010.
- ²⁰ Richard J. Norton, “Feral Cities: Problems Today, Battlefields Tomorrow?” p. 57. Via Robert J. Bunker and John P. Sullivan, “Integrating Feral Cities and Third Phase Cartels/Third Generation Gangs Research: The Rise of Criminal (Narco) City Networks and BlackFor,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, vol. 22, no. 5, December 2011, tables 1 to 3, pp. 767–769.
- ²¹ Lieutenant Commander Matthew M. Frick, “Feral Cities—Pirate Havens,” *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, vol. 134, no. 12, December 2008, <http://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2008-12/feral-cities-pirate-havens>.
- ²² For a partial exception, see the public lecture “Battlespace/s 1: Feral Cities and the Scientific Way of War” in London in 2008, <http://bldgblog.blogspot.com/2008/11/feral-cities.html>. This lecture by Geoff Manaugh and Antoine Bosquet was a preview of Bosquet’s then forthcoming work *The Scientific Way of Warfare: Order and Chaos on the Battlefields of Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).
- ²³ Bunker and Sullivan, “Integrating Feral Cities,” pp. 764–786. Nils Gilman would suggest that the archetypal feral city can be found when viewing the history of Naples since the Middle Ages; see Roberto Saviano, *Gomorrah: A Personal Journey into the Violent International Empire of Naples’ Organized Crime System* (New York: Picador, 2008).
- ²⁴ Initial concerns and threat perceptions concerning such developments can be traced to early research dating back to the mid-to-late 1980s. This body of work is known as Epochal Warfare theory. For some initial examples of this research published in U.S. Army publications, see Robert J. Bunker,

- “Epochal Change: War Over Social and Political Organization,” *Parameters*, vol. 27, no. 2, Summer 1997, pp. 15–25, and Robert J. Bunker, *Five-Dimensional (Cyber) Warfighting: Can the Army After Next be Defeated Through Complex Concepts and Technologies?* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, March 1998), pp. 1–47.
- ²⁵ See Robert J. Bunker and John P. Sullivan, *Studies in Gangs and Cartels* (London: Routledge, 2013). For another example of cross-form VNSA-type research, see James J. F. Forest, ed., *Intersections of Crime and Terror* (London: Routledge, 2013).
- ²⁶ The demolition of abandoned housing and commercial property in Detroit is well documented due to that city’s large loss of industry and population. The comments concerning St. Louis are derived from the author’s direct observations and discussions with local residents while attending an FBI–PFI Futures Working Group (FWG) meeting in the fall of 2006.
- ²⁷ Alex Perry, “Pistorius and South Africa’s Culture of Violence,” *Time*, 11 March 2013, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2137420-1,00.html>.
- ²⁸ Bunker and Sullivan, “Integrating Feral Cities,” pp. 779–781.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, tables 4 to 5, pp. 775–776.
- ³⁰ Human and blood sacrifices are a component of radical (including Salafist) jihadism in the Middle East, narco forms of Santa Muerte and radical Christian (La Familia and Los Caballeros Templarios) spirituality in Mexico, and apocalyptic cults such as that found with the Lord’s Resistance Army in Central Africa.
- ³¹ The White House, *Issuance of the Sequestration Order Pursuant to Section 251A of the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985, as Amended*, 1 March 2013, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/memoranda/2013/m-13-06.pdf>.
- ³² Central Intelligence Agency, “United States,” *The World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/us.html>.
- ³³ “Interest Expense on the Debt Outstanding,” *TreasuryDirect*, http://www.treasurydirect.gov/govt/reports/ir/ir_expense, and *Budget of the U.S. Government, Budget of the United States Government, Fiscal Year 2013* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 13 February 2012), <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/search/pagedetails.action?packageId=BUDGET-2013-BUD>.
- ³⁴ Dan Froomkin, “Half of American Households Hold 1 Percent of Wealth,” *Huffington Post*, 19 July 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/07/19/households-wealth-american-1-percent_n_1687015.html, and Tim Chen, “American Household Credit Card Debt Statistics through 2012,” *Nerdwallet*, March 2013, <http://www.nerdwallet.com/blog/credit-card-data/average-credit-card-debt-household>.
- ³⁵ Alana Semuels, “U.S. firms’ cash hoard: \$1.45 Trillion,” *Los Angeles Times*, 21 March 2013, p. B5.
- ³⁶ Amitai Etzioni, “The Folly of Nation Building,” *The National Interest*, July/August 2012, p. 61. For the lack of return on our investment, producing no strategic investment, see Brian Michael Jenkins, “The Invasion of Iraq: A Balance Sheet,” *The RAND Blog*, 22 March 2013, <http://m.rand.org/blog/2013/03/the-invasion-of-iraq-a-balance-sheet.html>.
- ³⁷ For background on the illicit economy, see Moises Naim, *Illicit: How Smugglers, Traffickers and Copycats are Hijacking the Global Economy* (New York: Anchor Books, 2006), and Jesse Goldhammer, Steven Weber and Nils Gilman, eds., *Deviant Globalization: Black Market Economy in the 21st Century* (New York: Continuum, 2011).
- ³⁸ “Toaster” is a derogatory term for an armed and sentient (artificial intelligence-based) military robot in the series *Battlestar Galactica*.

- ³⁹ We should make it a national military policy to refrain from using private military corporations (i.e., mercenaries) except in specific and well-reasoned situations. For insights into this debate, see T. X. Hammes, *Private Contractors in Conflict Zones: The Good, the Bad and the Strategic Impact*, Strategic Forum No. 260 (Washington, DC: Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University, October 2010).
- ⁴⁰ Robert J. Bunker, Op-Ed: “The Need for a ‘Half-Pivot to the Americas,’” Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 10 January 2013, <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/index.cfm/articles/The-Need-For-A-Half-Pivot-to-the-Americas/2013/01/07>.
- ⁴¹ Robert Bunker, “Mexican Cartel Strategic Note No. 10: Fortified Town (*Burgward*) Strategy Implemented in Tamaulipas,” *Small Wars Journal—El Centro*, 13 December 2011, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/mexican-cartel-strategic-note-no-10>. Ultimately, Mexican federal authority must be maintained throughout that nation for U.S. national security requirements.
- ⁴² See Sylvia Longmire, “Is Chicago on the Road to Becoming an American Ciudad Juárez?” *Small Wars Journal—El Centro*, 20 November 2012, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/is-chicago-on-the-road-to-becoming-an-american-ciudad-juarez>. For early indications of the separation of the haves and have-nots and the privatization of public spaces in America, we can see the initial rise of gated communities. See Evan McKenzie, *Privatopia: Homeowner Associations and the Rise of Residential Private Government* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994) and Edward J. Blakely and Mary Gail Snyder, *Fortress America: Gated Communities in the United States* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1999).
- ⁴³ See Brian Woolworth, “Enhancing North American Security through Military to Military Relationships,” *Small Wars Journal—El Centro*, 30 November 2012, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/enhancing-north-american-security-through-military-to-military-relationships>.
- ⁴⁴ Ralph Peters, “Our Soldiers, Their Cities,” *Parameters*, vol. 26, no. 1, Spring 1996, pp. 43–50. Numerous works were published on urban operations by Russell Glenn and others during the ~1995–2005 period. Many of these came from the Arroyo Center at RAND. They were subsequently eclipsed by counterinsurgency-focused writings as Army operations ramped up in Iraq and Afghanistan.
- ⁴⁵ See, for instance, Christian Caryl, “The Democracy Boondoggle in Iraq,” *Foreign Policy*, 5 March 2013, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/03/05/the_democracy_boondoggle_in_iraq.
- ⁴⁶ For another perspective on the strategic importance of cities—via a city-as-a-system approach—and the ensuing U.S. policy implications, see David J. Kilcullen, “The City as a System: Future Conflict and Urban Resilience,” *Fletcher Forum of World Affairs*, vol. 36, no. 2, Summer 2012, pp. 19–39, <http://www.fletcherforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Kilcullen.pdf>.

