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## Violent Non-State Actors - An Overview

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*Violent Non-State Actors (VNSAs) are individuals or groups who engage in violent and criminal activities outside of the bounds of conventional state institutions. VNSAs are well-organized anti-government rebellious groups that often have more powerful resources than legitimate state security forces. They are not bound by the same rules and regulations which makes them a challenge to national and international securities. While VNSAs have attracted significant attention from both the academic and policy communities, much of the existing laws and policies surrounding them are still in their early stages. This is largely because VNSAs operate outside of traditional state institutions, making it very difficult to create legal and institutional frameworks to combat them.*

**Keywords:** *violent, non-state actors, academic, policy communities.*

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### INTRODUCTION

Violent Non-State Actors are a product of a weak state. To communicate and achieve their political aims, they resort to organized attacks. For example, in 2008, the terror attack in Mumbai operated by a Pakistani Militant Organization called "Lashkar-e Taiba" was declared as an act of Non-State Actors by the then Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari. There are many forms of VNSA, which include:

- National liberation movements confronting an occupying force.

- Insurgents are engaged in protracted political and military struggles that eat the power of the ruling government.
- Terrorists use threats of violence to effect political change.
- Irregular yet recognisable armed forces working within an ungoverned area or failing state.
- Mercenary Militia.<sup>1</sup>

## ROLE OF VSNA'S ON GLOBAL CONFLICTS

Almost every part of the world can experience the violent activities of these groups. The execution of their plans is very well thought out. For example, Suicide bombers are inspired and counselled by their victims by al Qaeda and in countries like Afghanistan, Iraq, Algeria, Yemen, and beyond. Somali rovers disrupt shipping in the Indian Ocean, hijacking civilians and exacting governments. Warlords terrify the creeks of the Niger Delta as part of a “ blood oil painting ” trade. A quasi-religious medicine combination, La Familia, decapitates its way to control Mexican medicine trafficking routes.<sup>2</sup> Maoist rebels of Nepal to the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).<sup>3</sup>

Recent conflicts such as Syria, Libya, Iraq, and Afghanistan are increasingly characterized by a multitude of irregular and privatized forms of violence. These actors include warlords, mercenaries, terrorists, transnational organized crime groups, foreign combatants, and private military and security companies (PMSCs). Some challenge the state directly, while others are complementary and symbiotic with the state. As such, violent non-state actors compete with and cooperate with state actors in contemporary conflicts. Since these actors often defy well-defined taxonomies, the question arises as to how these actors are best understood. In modern conflicts, the lines between terrorists and organized crime groups, irregular and regular forces,

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<sup>1</sup> Klejda Mulaj, *Violent Non State Actors in World Politics* (Hurst Publishers 2010)

<sup>2</sup> Troy S. Thomas, 'Beyond Pain: Coercing Violent Non-State Actors' (*United States Air Force Academy*, 2010) <<https://www.usafa.edu/app/uploads/Thomas-Coercing-VNSA.pdf>> accessed 17 January 2023

<sup>3</sup> Troy S. Thomas & William Casebeer, 'Violent Non State Actors: Countering Dynamic Systems' (*Research Gate*, March 2004) <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/235082745\\_Violent\\_Non-State\\_Actors\\_Countering\\_Dynamic\\_Systems](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/235082745_Violent_Non-State_Actors_Countering_Dynamic_Systems)> accessed 16 January 2023

and the economic and political motivations for fighting are increasingly blurred. As a result, 'new' and 'old' types of violent non-state actors define the elements of contemporary conflict. Conflicts in the 21st century are so complex that a more integrated approach between military and civilian actors is required to meet this challenge more effectively.<sup>4</sup>

## POSSIBLE REASONS FOR THE UPRISING OF THE VSNA'S

### Non Religious Violence:-

**Drug Cartels:** In May 2014, the Marxist militants also known as the shining path guerrillas attacked the Satipo province of the Junín Region. Their aim behind the attack was not to create a Marxist state which happens to be their original motive, but this time it was related to drug trafficking and the skin business probably.<sup>5</sup>

**Political Violence:** In June 2021, Mexico experienced a polarized political environment as the criminal groups tried to leave an illicit influence on the voters to seek an alliance with their favorite future officials so that they can have their share of the profit and advantage. Several killings took place during the election season especially of the people who stood against the criminal groups.<sup>6</sup>

**Ideological Differences:** PKK and YPG a terrorist organization with the ideology of Kurdish Nationalism dug tunnels in Turkey in 2021, with the intention of infiltration and executing terror attacks.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> David Brown et al., *Violent Non Actors in Modern Politics* (Howgate Publishing 2021)

<sup>5</sup> Jacob Zen, 'Peru's Shining Path Guerrillas Launch New Attacks in Apurimac Valley' (2021) 19(11) *Terrorism Monitor* <<https://jamestown.org/program/briefs-351/>> accessed 17 January 23

<sup>6</sup> 'Electoral Violence and Illicit Influence in Mexico's Hot Land' (*International Crisis Group*, 02 June 2021) <<https://www.crisisgroup.org/latin-america-caribbean/mexico/089-electoral-violence-and-illicit-influence-mexicos-hot-land>> accessed 17 January 2023

<sup>7</sup> Mohamad Mishto & Omer Koparan, 'PKK/YPG digs tunnel in Turkish-Syrian Border' (*AA*, 01 June 2021) <<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/pkk-ypg-digs-tunnels-close-to-turkish-syrian-border/2260030>> accessed 17 January 2023

## WHITE SUPREMACY AND FAR-RIGHT EXTREMISM

White Supremacy is a belief of belonging to a superior race among the people who have light or white skin. In 2019, during the Trump rule, the United State Department of Justice officially acknowledged in the New York times that white supremacy and far-right Extremism are the greatest domestic security threat that the United States is facing. Killings by individuals or far-right Extremist groups have risen at an alarming rate.<sup>8</sup>

**Religious Violence:** Violence in the name of religious faith is an age-old phenomenon. Terrorism in the name of religion has become the predominant model for political violence in the modern world. Religious terrorism can be communal, genocidal, nihilistic, or revolutionary. It can be committed by lone wolves, clandestine cells, large dissident movements, or governments.<sup>9</sup> It is believed by some radical scholars that killing in the name of God and conserving religion is fine because God is on their side. Al-Aqsa Mosque in the Middle East often becomes a hotspot of violence as it is a subject of faith for all three religions- Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. Because of religious beliefs, there is always an unpleasant atmosphere between the people of Palestine and Israel. Israel's Occupation force attack Palestinian frequently.<sup>10</sup> In retaliation, an Islamist group called Hamas has risen as the Violent Non-State Actor in Gaza for their people.

**Extremism and Radicalization:** This is yet another cause that gives rise to VNSA. Radicalized and Extremist activities have increased in frequency, especially in the last 3 decades. It can be witnessed in every corner of the world. In Feb 1994, a radicalized Zionist fired 30 rounds of bullets at a crowd of 800 Muslims outside a mosque, killing 29 and injuring 150. They had congregated for prayers in Ibrahim Mosque located at Hebron city of West Bank. Countries like Syria and Iraq are struggling with Sectarian violence. They are countries with Sunni Muslim majorities and Shia Muslims are persecuted and forced to leave the state. Acc to United Nations

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<sup>8</sup> Domestic Terrorism Prevention Act 2019, s 2(2)

<sup>9</sup> 'Religious Terrorism' (2012) SagePublication <[https://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/33557\\_6.pdf](https://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/33557_6.pdf)> accessed 17 January 2023

<sup>10</sup> 'Occupation Forces attack Palestinians in Hebron' (*Middle East Monitor*, 03 December 2022)<<https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20221203-israel-occupation-forces-settlers-attack-palestinians-in-hebron/>>accessed January 2023

Report, between April 2008 to July 2008 more than 2500 people were killed in the Iraq-Iran Conflict. "USCIRF since 2008 has acknowledged Iraq as the "country of particular concern".<sup>11</sup>

According to Times Magazine, the Buddhist monk Asin Virathu is stated to be the face of Rohingya terror. In 2017, he led the 969 national movements that advocated and also executed the ethnic cleansing of Rohingya Muslims in the Rakhine state of Myanmar.<sup>12</sup> Thousands of people were killed including children, women, and girls were raped and their villages were burnt down to ashes. United Nation described it as a "textbook example of ethnic cleansing"<sup>13</sup> In both the above-mentioned cases Islamic Extremist group known as "The Islamic State" in Iraq whereas the Burmese military known as "Tadmadv" <sup>14</sup> acted as Violent Non-State actor.

***Important Legislations in India against Non-State Actors:*** The persecution of minorities such as Shia, Ahmad, Hindus, and Christians is nothing new in Pakistan. News about such persecution circulates regularly. Radicalized and fanatic organisations such as the "Pakistan Taliban" are responsible for such behaviour.<sup>15</sup>

## **PSYCHOLOGY AND ADAPTABILITY OF THEIR CHANGED ENVIRONMENTS**

VNSAs such as terrorist groups, drug trafficking companies, etc are increasingly present in the same surroundings wherein the Army and different state authority forces operate. Such groups pose long-lasting and direct threats to the State's protection and interest. The ability of VNSAs to initiate war, inflict violence, and indulge in transnational crimes makes them a chronic danger to society. Their flexibility and adaptability to the changed environment and threats make it difficult to counter these groups. Let's have a look at a research report by Rand Corporation

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<sup>11</sup> 'Did You Know Sectarian Terrorism in Iraq' (*United Nation Commission International Religious Freedom*) <<https://www.uscirf.gov/publications/did-you-knowsectarian-violence-iraq>> accessed 18 January 2023

<sup>12</sup> Romania Hukil, 'Myanmar: Unveiling the Face of Buddhist Terror' (*IPCS*, 08 July 2013) <[http://www.ipcs.org/comm\\_select.php?articleNo=4023](http://www.ipcs.org/comm_select.php?articleNo=4023)> accessed 18 January 2023

<sup>13</sup> 'Myanmar Rohingya: What You Need to Know About the Crisis' (*BBC*, 23 January 2020) <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-41566561>> accessed 18 January 2023

<sup>14</sup> 'Tatmadaw: Myanmar's Notoriously Brutal Military' (*BBC*, 02 February 2022) <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-56660483>> accessed 18 January 2023

<sup>15</sup> Naumamana Suleman, 'From Exclusion to Violence: The Case of Religious Minorities in Pakistan' (*Minority Rights Group International*, 23 August 2022) <<https://minorityrights.org/2022/08/23/pakistan-forb-2022/>> accessed 18 January 2023

conducted in 2022 with the object of understanding the adaptive capacity of some of the common VNSAs and the means to mitigate the same.

## KEY FINDINGS

**Most VNSA adaptations occur within the first five years of a VNSA's existence:** As per the reports, it was observed that the examined VNSAs adapted to their environments spontaneously and maintained adaptive ability throughout the existence of their entity. It means that if an attempt is made to limit its ability to adapt quickly to its environment in the initial stage of its existence, shall limit its possibility to remain operative for a long time.

**Not all VNSA change with the same frequency:** Depending upon the operating environment along with the strategies adopted by the state forces to counter them can cause a difference in their level of adaptation.

**Of the 46 VNSA adaptations examined, 12 occurred in roughly one-half of the periods and two-thirds of the cases examined:** The 12 adaptations occur frequently. Knowing that these adaptations are the most likely to occur can inform how resources are focused, the development of indicators for their detection, and the creation of means for mitigating their occurrence or the effects of their occurrence.

**Restricting the supply of war weapons can obstruct VNSA's ability to adapt:** The state forces should ensure that the military and war weapons to these actors should not be accessible. Without weapons, they cannot wage war or inflict violence.

## RECOMMENDED ACTIONS TO STATE FORCES AS PER RESEARCH REPORT

- Curbing the rise of VNSA is possible in the initial years of their existence by recognizing, and keeping a tight vigil on the slightest of their actions and also by taking necessary preventive measures before they could harm.
- Social, economic, political, Military, environmental, information, infrastructure, and time are some important factors that should be taken into account while incorporating an

operational environment to combat the adaptations of VNSA, especially in vulnerable geographical terrain.

- Concentrate tactics and effort on preventing VNSAs from gaining. Access to services, technology, and warfighting equipment, as well as on VNSAs' ability to conquer and maintain territory.
- Identifying, scrutinizing, and taking preventive measures to curb VNSA's rise in the initial years of their existence. Incorporate functional terrain and organizational variables related to advanced situations of VNSA adaption into functional assessment fabrics, similar as political, military, profitable, social, information, structure, terrain, and time.
- Focus strategies and sweat on limiting VNSAs' access to service, technology, and warfighting tackle and on VNSAs to seize and hold terrain.<sup>16</sup>

#### COUNTERATTACKS BY STATES AGAINST VNSA'S

- Abdelmalek Droukdel, a jihadist in Algeria who led several attacks near the Algerian border was killed by the French Special Forces.<sup>17</sup>
- The leader of Boko Haram Abubaker Shekau is reported to have been killed after the UK increased its counter-terrorism focus in the region.<sup>18</sup>
- According to United Nations Security Council report, an autonomous drone made by Turkey was hunted down and remotely engaged in May 2021. This drone was supposed to have AI sensors and explosives capable to destroy human targets.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Michael Vasseur et al., 'Understanding and Reducing the Ability of Violent Non State Actors to Adap to Change' (*Rand Organaisation*, 2022) <[https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RRA324-1.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA324-1.html)> accessed 18 January 2023

<sup>17</sup> 'Counter-Terrorism in the Sahel: A Training Session with French Special Forces' (*France24*, 03 June 21) <<https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20210603-counter-terrorism-in-the-sahel-a-training-session-with-french-special-forces>> accessed 18 January 2023

<sup>18</sup> Rafael Pantucci, 'The UK and Threats of African Terrorism' (*RUSI*, 03 June 2021) <<https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/one-down-many-more-challenges-uk-and-threats-african-terrorism>> accessed 18 January 2023

<sup>19</sup> Tyler Durden, 'Kamikaze AI Drone "Hunted Down" HumanTargets' (*Activist Post*, 30 May 2021) <<https://www.activistpost.com/2021/05/kamikaze-ai-drone-hunted-down-human-targets.html>> accessed 18 January 2023

## INTERNATIONAL LEGISLATIONS GOVERNING VIOLENT NON-STATE ACTORS

**Article 42** of the UN Charter empowers the Security Council to pass orders as it may deem fit to maintain or restore peace and order in a state with conflicts. To maintain peace and order they may apply economic sanctions, arms embargoes, or deploy peace-keeping forces. The decision taken by the security council is legally binding on some or all member countries as the council may deem fit.<sup>20</sup> The main purpose behind forming Security Council was to maintain peace and order throughout the world. For instance, it passed a resolution to end violence in Myanmar against Rohingya Muslims.<sup>21</sup>

**United Nations Human Right Council (UNHRC):** UNHRC is an inter-governmental body of 47 states members and its objective is to keep a check on and discuss the issues related to human rights that require attention.

**Geneva Convention:** Geneva Convention is the international humanitarian law that governs the conduct of armed conflict and strives to mitigate its effects. They specifically defend those not engaged in combat (civilians, medical professionals, and humanitarian workers) as well as those who have left the fray (wounded, ill, shipwrecked soldiers, and prisoners of war).<sup>22</sup>

**International Atomic Energy Agency:** Established in 1957, its main function is to promote and assist research programs in atomic energy and also to ensure the positive and peaceful use of the same.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> 'How Decisions are made at the UN' (*United Nations*) <<https://www.un.org/en/model-united-nations/how-decisions-are-made-un#:~:text=The%20only%20resolutions%20that%20have,adopted%20by%20the%20Security%20Council.&text=Th is%20explains%20why%20Member%20States,possible%20agreement%20among%20Member%20States.>> accessed 18 January 2023

<sup>21</sup> 'UN Security Council resolution demands end to Myanmar Violence' (*AlJazeera*, 22 December 2022) <<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/12/22/un-security-council-resolution-demands-end-to-myanmar-violence>> accessed 18 January 2023

<sup>22</sup> 'The Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols' (*ICRC*, 01 January 2014) <<https://www.icrc.org/en/document/geneva-conventions-1949-additional-protocols>> accessed 18 January 2023

<sup>23</sup> 'International Atomic Energy Agency' (*NTI*, 06 January 2023) <<https://www.nti.org/education-center/treaties-and-regimes/international-atomic-energy-agency/>> accessed 18 January 2023



**North Atlantic Treaty Organization NATO:** Established in 1949 by United Nation and several other Western Countries. To have physical and political security among the western countries, it was signed against the Soviet Union.<sup>24</sup> NATO was deployed by the UN Security Council mandate for nearly 20 years in Afghanistan against the Taliban until 2021.<sup>25</sup>

**United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, 1988:** It's an object to prevent and restrict the trafficking of narcotics.

**The 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS):** The object of this Convention is to regulate maritime transports as sea piracy and armed robbery is a global threat.

**Important Legislations in India against Non-State Actors:**

- The Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act of 1967 and the National Security Act of 1980 are the laws now in effect in India to encounter terrorism;
- The Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985;
- The Anti-Maritime Piracy Bill, 2019 is in the making.

**CONCLUSION**

The rise of violent non-state actors has created a new challenge for states and security organizations. These actors use violence and intimidation to advance their aims, often without regard for the rule of law or the safety of civilians. States and security organizations must work together to develop strategies for tackling these actors and protecting civilians. States must also ensure that their criminal justice systems can deal with these offenders and that their militaries are prepared to respond to any threats.

Security organizations must work to build relationships with local communities, and work to build trust and understanding. They must also be prepared to rapidly deploy resources to areas

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<sup>24</sup> 'North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, 1949' (*Office of the Historian*) <<https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/nato>> accessed 18 January 2023

<sup>25</sup> 'NATO and Afghanistan' (*North Atlantic Treaty Organisation*, 31 August 2022) <[https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_8189.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_8189.htm)> accessed 18 January 2023

where they are needed most. States and security organizations must work together to develop strategies for tackling these actors and protecting civilians.