

No "Ordinary Crimes"

An Alternative Approach to Securing Global Hotspots and Dense Urban Areas

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A slum in the Jogeshwari-Goreagaon East area 10 October 2014 in the suburbs of megacity Mumbai, India. (Photo by Maciej Dakowicz via Alamy)

The planet has rarely been so peaceful. Even with terrible fighting in such places as Congo, Syria, and Yemen, wars between and within countries are becoming less common and less deadly. But a dark menace looms. Some of the developing world's cities threaten to be engulfed by murder.

—*The Economist*

When the Sovereign Power ceaseth, Crime also ceaseth: for where there is no such Power, there is no protection to be had from the Law; and therefore every one may protect himself by his own power.

—Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*

Today, the U.S. Army is facing a complex and uncertain world. Its soldiers gained vast operational experience over the past fifteen years, but it is unclear where or when they will be asked to operate next. At the same time, the entire enterprise is under redesign—with every part of DOTMLPF-P (doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel, facilities, and policy) under close scrutiny. Against this background, Army leaders plan for the future by identifying the most likely and most dangerous threats and likely operating environments such as dense urban areas.¹ For those who ask, “Which of the world’s hot spots is the Army least prepared for?” the answer is in the question. We are not well prepared for *any* of the most likely threats today. We seek answers framed by *place*, diligently seeking hot spots, hostile states, and failed nations to the detriment of identifying global trends. While a serious study of peer threats is necessary—large-scale combat operations are the most deadly of all possible scenarios—our search for places and spaces creates a blind spot that leads us to miss the single most impactful instability for most of the world: crime. Boundaries, borders, and terrain features do not matter to criminals who exploit others for their own gain. Latin America illustrates a region suffering from our lack of attention. As *The Economist* noted in April 2018,

Latin America, which boasts just 8% of the world’s population, accounts for 38% of its criminal killing. The butcher’s bill in the region came to around 140,000 people last year, more than have been lost in wars around the world in almost all of the years this century.²

Though it is tempting to ignore the global effects of “ordinary crime” against residents of developing nations, as long as the Army focuses primarily on peer threats and state-sponsored actors, we will continue to face global insecurity with no solution.

Revisiting the Megacities Project

Megacities, those of ten million residents or more, came to the forefront with the publication of 2013’s *Out of the Mountains* by counterinsurgency scholar David Kilcullen.³ In a 2012 article, Kilcullen previewed his vision of a future operational environment that would be driven by three “megatrends”: (1) urbanization and mass migration to urban megacities, (2) littoralization (i.e., explosive growth of coastal cities with seaports), and (3) connectedness of populations through more accessible communications technology.⁴ Kilcullen was concerned about the developing areas of Asia, Latin America, and Africa.⁵ He cautioned,

These [United Nations] data show that coastal cities are about to be swamped by a human tide that will force them to absorb—in less than 40 years—almost the entire increase in population across the whole planet in all of recorded human history up to 1960. Furthermore, virtually all of this urbanization will happen in the world’s least developed areas, by definition the poorest equipped to handle it: a recipe for conflict, and crises in health, education, governance, food, energy, and water scarcity.⁶

Given the scope and scale of the above scenario, it was no surprise that Army strategists began to closely study dense urban areas. Unfortunately, subsequent discussions have been more about materiel solutions and physical terrain than people. The Chief of Staff of the Army’s Strategic Study Group tackled megacities in its 2014 report, “Megacities and the United States Army: Preparing for a Complex and Uncertain Future.”⁷ This project posed many relevant questions but was also largely terrain-centric.⁸

The new Field Manual (FM) 3-0, *Operations*, does little to advance our understanding of the impact of criminals on global security. This doctrine acknowledges that, “Enemies will employ conventional tactics, terror, criminal activity, and information warfare to further complicate operations.”⁹ However, FM 3-0 makes only seven mentions of crime, and all in the context of criminal

threats being a part of major combat.¹⁰ Contrast our current narratives with what we know about Latin America. This region is not a current hotspot, and yet its urbanization and crime are a global concern. *The Economist* points out that, as of 2000, over 75 percent of Latin America lives in urban areas—“roughly twice the proportion in Asia and Africa.”¹¹ The implications of urbanization are more instability, and Latin America serves as a cautionary tale for other regions:

That move from the countryside concentrated risk factors for lethal violence—inequality, unemployed young men, dislocated families, poor government services, easily available firearms—even as it also brought together the factors needed for economic growth. As other developing economies catch up with Latin America’s level of urbanisation, understanding the process’s links to criminality, and which forms of policing best sever them, is of international concern.¹²

Crawling through Crime Data

To understand the fears and basic security needs of ordinary people in the developing world, we need to work harder to understand crime in these communities. The International Crime Victimization Study (ICVS), supported by the United Nations Interregional Criminal Justice Research Institute, was a series of city-level standardized surveys administered in 2000 and conducted in Central and Eastern Europe, Africa, Latin America, and Asia. Over fifty-three thousand respondents were asked face-to-face in their native language about their experiences with crimes such as motor vehicle theft, assault, sexual assault, and robbery; their satisfaction with police; perceptions of safety in the community; reasons for reporting or not reporting crimes; and social, economic, and demographic information.¹³ The benefit of this survey was to capture crimes that would otherwise be missing from government records due to under- and unreported crimes, poor police recordkeeping, police or judicial corruption, shame, fear, or guilt. While the ICVS is not perfect, criminologist Irshad Altheimer states that the survey is “currently the most far-reaching and reliable source of comparable crime victimization data in different nations.”¹⁴

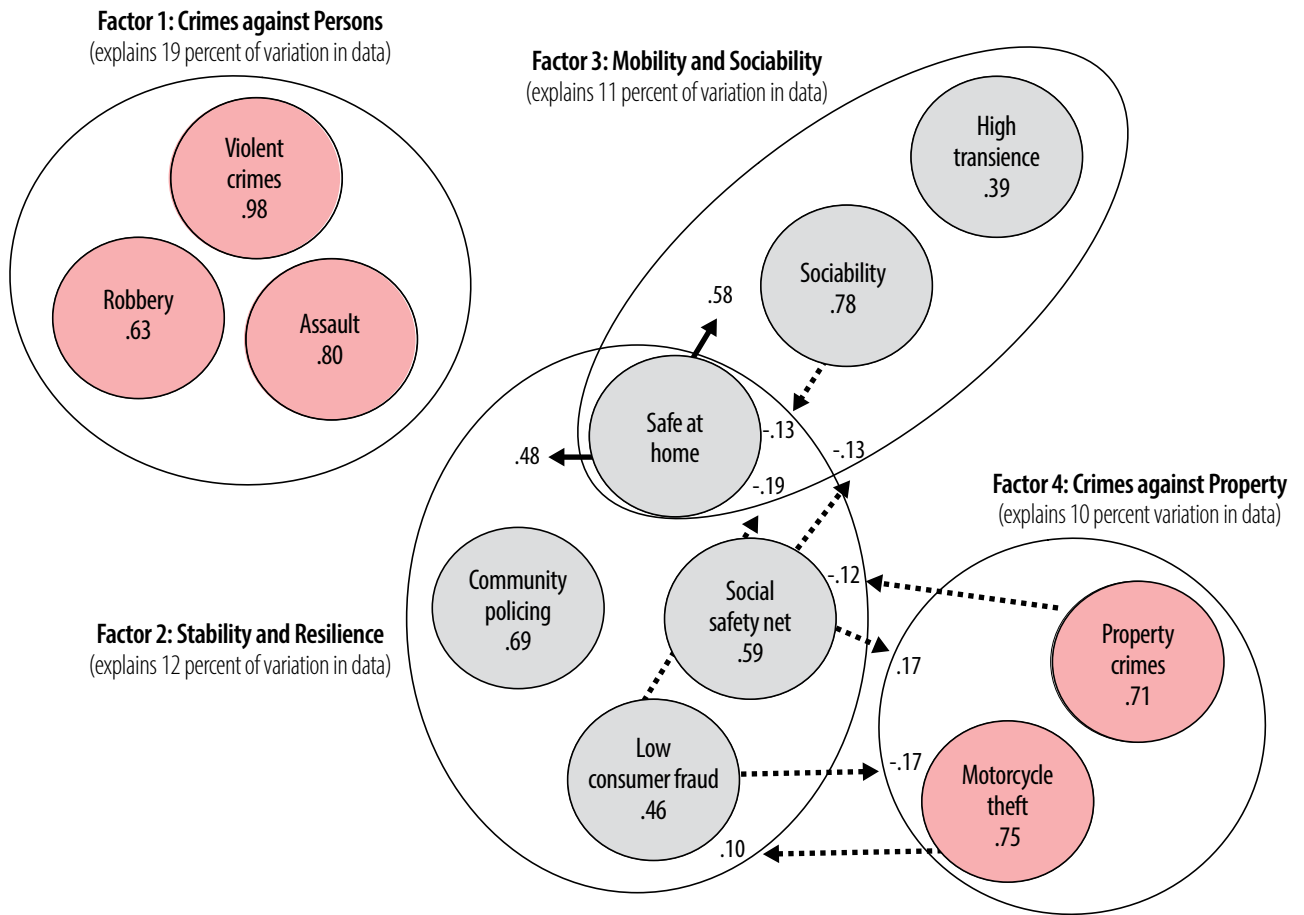
What can surveys tell us about instability across the globe? The 2000 ICVS city data includes whether

an individual was robbed in the past year and whether he or she was assaulted, and it provides an index of all violent crimes he or she experienced (to include robbery and sexual assault). The survey asked the number of times a person experienced motorcycle theft or other thefts. While theft may not appear at first to impact security, motorcycles are an important means of commerce and transportation in congested megacities and developing nations. The theft of a bike, tuk-tuk (auto rickshaw), or scooter would be a significant event for someone who depended on it for financial support. The ICVS asked how long someone lived in his or her community (an indicator of transience), how often he or she went out at night to a restaurant, club, or pub—an indicator of sociability—whether the person experienced consumer fraud, how helpful the person thought the police were (confidence in community policing), how well the person thought that members of the local community looked after one another (e.g., a social safety net), and how safe at home at night the person felt.

In order to better understand life in the developing world, I leveraged a statistical software package to analyze all these answers across fifty-three thousand people to see which cluster together in unique factors. Four major factors emerged and are depicted in figure 1 (on page 18).

Factor 1, “Crimes against Persons,” calls to mind the criminal threats, drug dealers, and petty criminals of Kilcullen’s research. The respondents’ personal experiences of victimization are highly related to this factor and include robbery, assault, and violent crimes. Factor 2, “Stability and Resilience,” shows strong relationships between survey

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(Figure by author. Source: International Crime Victimization Survey, 2000)

Figure 1. Factors of Crime and Life in the Developing World

answers about having a “social safety net,” “feeling safe at home at night,” “confidence in community policing,” and low “consumer fraud.” Factor 3, “Mobility and Sociability,” suggests the young, vibrant urban life in developing cities. Respondents with high scores on this factor also report high levels of “transience,” “sociability,” and “feeling safe at home at night.” Interestingly, reports of “feeling safe at home at night” are significant to both the Stability and Resilience factor and the Mobility and Sociability factor. This survey question, therefore, shows promise as a powerful predictor of the safety of a community. Factor 4, “Crimes against Property,” is significantly related to reports of total property crimes and motorcycle theft.

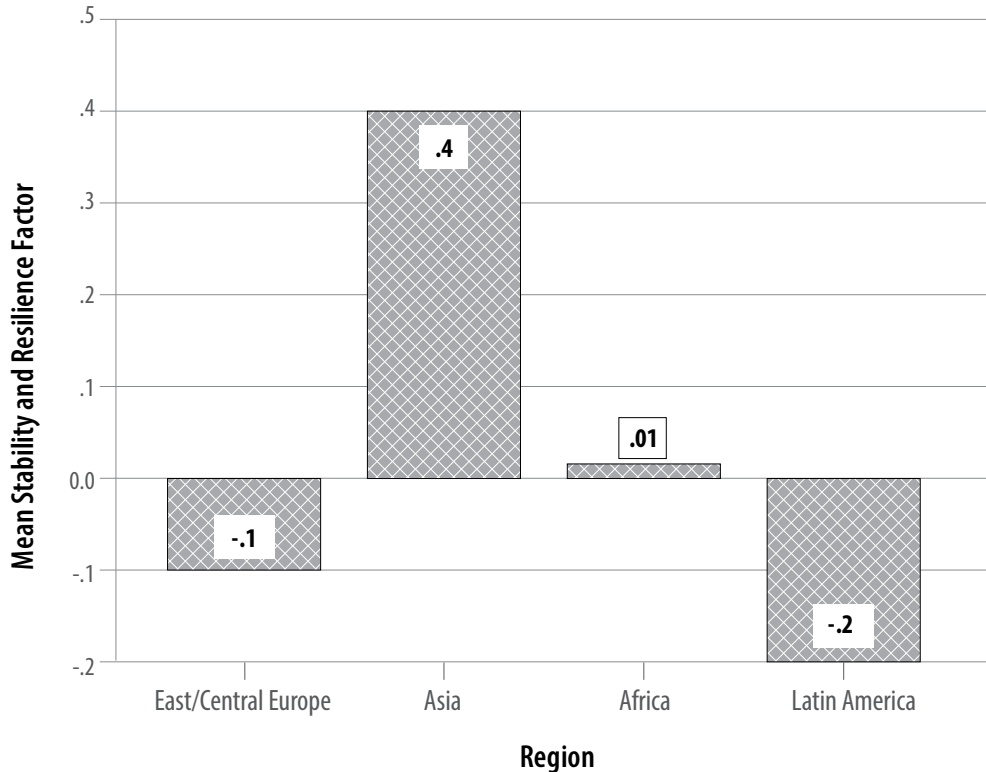
Overall, these four factors are intriguing. Different types of crimes cluster together in factor 1—representing crime and instability—but these bad experiences appear

largely *unrelated and separate* from the other feelings and perceptions of safety and security. Additionally, Crimes against Persons (i.e., violent crimes) are not strongly related to Crimes against Property, such as petty crimes/theft. The Mobility and Sociability factor encapsulates many of the characteristics we expect to see in one living in a dense urban area, and yet these people often report high confidence in being “safe at home at night”—which is not the conventional wisdom for developing nations. The Stability and Resilience factor depicts a cluster of different variables measuring the relationship between the citizen and society, such as expressing confidence or lack of confidence in the economy, community, and police. This factor is especially intriguing because it not only demonstrates a relationship between feeling safe and trusting other members of the community, but it also offers specific actionable solutions: improving policing and reducing fraud.

Exploring the data also suggests that our current regional focuses in Asia, Africa, and Europe may not be addressing areas of greatest need. Figure 2 shows the total scores of Stability and Resilience by region. Both Asia and Africa score average or above on this measure. Asian residents—even those in developing areas like Manila—score very high. What stands out is the low scores for those survey takers in Latin

alignment of forces construct, and the new security force assistance brigades. Are initiatives like these worthwhile, if resourced properly? This research suggests yes. An effective strategy develops ongoing relationships between U.S. units and multinational partners to increase familiarity with different cultures, foster trust, and increase mutual readiness. An effective strategy also maintains and extends what is referred to as “Phase 0”

(Shape) of operations to promote stability, shape the environment, deter adversaries, and provide a baseline knowledge of the life for ordinary citizens on the ground. Such shaping operations allow for a quicker escalation into combat if necessary (i.e., transition to “Phase 3,” Dominate).¹⁵ Army units are currently partnered with allies in Latin America, Asia, the Middle East, Africa, across Europe, and elsewhere. To the extent that regional indicators better explain variation in our key factors of Stability and Resilience, regional alignments are smart. Each region is different



(Figure by author. Source: International Crime Victimization Survey, 2000)

Figure 2. Average Stability and Resilience Factor by Region

America and Eastern/Central Europe. While this analysis is very preliminary, it shows how an examination of crime could inform strategy.

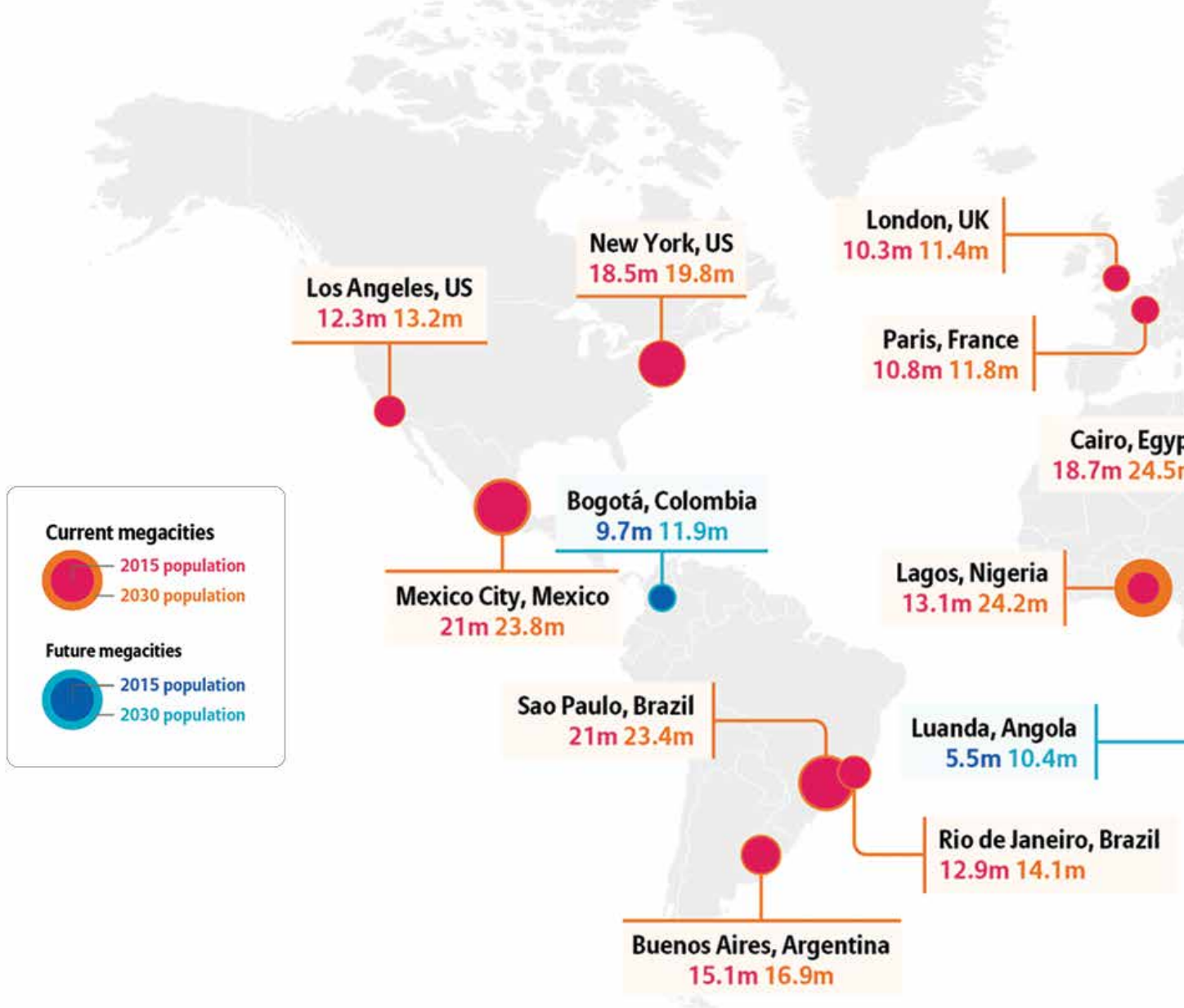
Resourcing and Readiness Recommendations

As the Army more closely considers the impact of crime and hybrid threats in the future, four preliminary recommendations stand out.

Increase regional expertise. Over the past fifteen years, the Army has rolled out varying initiatives to promote regional expertise, including embedded mentors, the Afghanistan-Pakistan Hands Program, the regional

in our model, suggesting that the Army is wise to cover all, rather than focusing on one or two to the exclusion of any. Megacities, however, do not stand out as uniquely vulnerable, unstable, or at risk in my statistical analysis. Therefore, we should not be overly concerned if our partnerships take us to training areas in Cameroon instead of terrain walks in Rio de Janeiro.

Focus broadening assignments on the right industries. Another recommendation of the Army Megacities Project relates to institutional leader development, recommending “civil-military partnerships to facilitate training, testing, and experimentation in large U.S. cities.”¹⁶ While there is likely great value

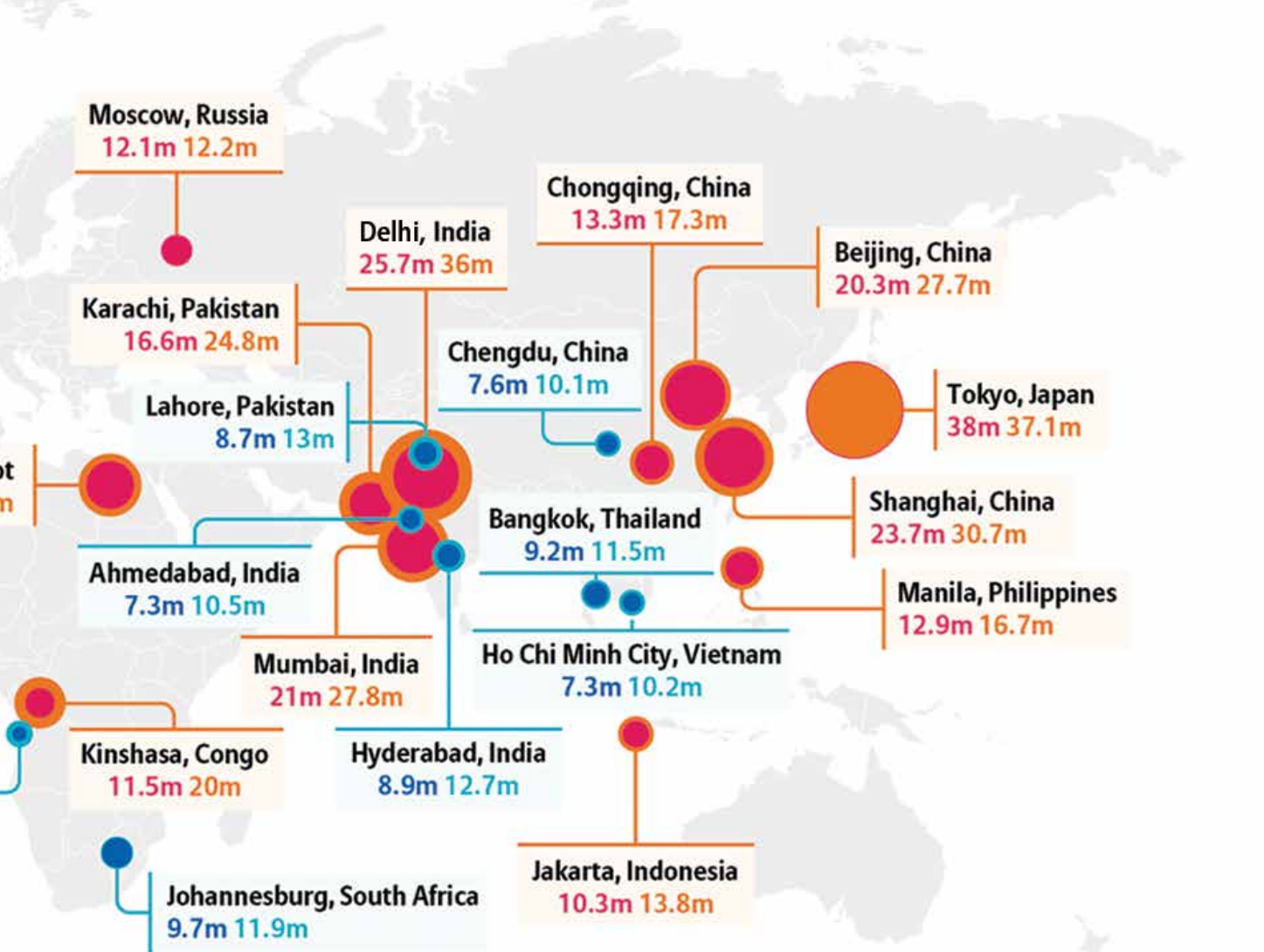


in spending a year as an interagency fellow with the Port Authority of New York or the Los Angeles Police Department, these do not address the bigger gap in our institutional knowledge—understanding individual political, social, and economic behavior, and understanding the precision behind predicting it. We would be better served, for example, to pursue a Training with Industry (TWI) program with a corporation such as Goya Foods, the iconic international food brand. Goya captured the attention of *Washington Post* business writer Lydia DePillis, who deemed it the quintessential “food company for all people new to America.”¹⁷ Goya operates under a direct store delivery business model to target each community with specific products aimed at the tastes and cultures of the consumer—whether

Caribbean, Asian, Salvadoran, or Filipino—instead of sending a standard inventory to every grocery store, as a bigger food company might do.¹⁸ While this model may limit the growth of Goya, it keeps its customers loyal and the company successful. The executive vice president in charge of distribution, Peter Unanue said,

To us, it’s important to make the connection through a product that maybe we’re not going to sell truckloads of, but we’re going to have the product on the shelf so when a consumer goes in they say, “Wow, I can relate to Goya because it’s authentic, this product makes me feel like I’m at home.”¹⁹

Understanding the Goya focus on microcommunities and its precision market research is the type of



(Figure used with permission from www.allianz.com. Source: World Urbanization Prospects, 2014 Revision)

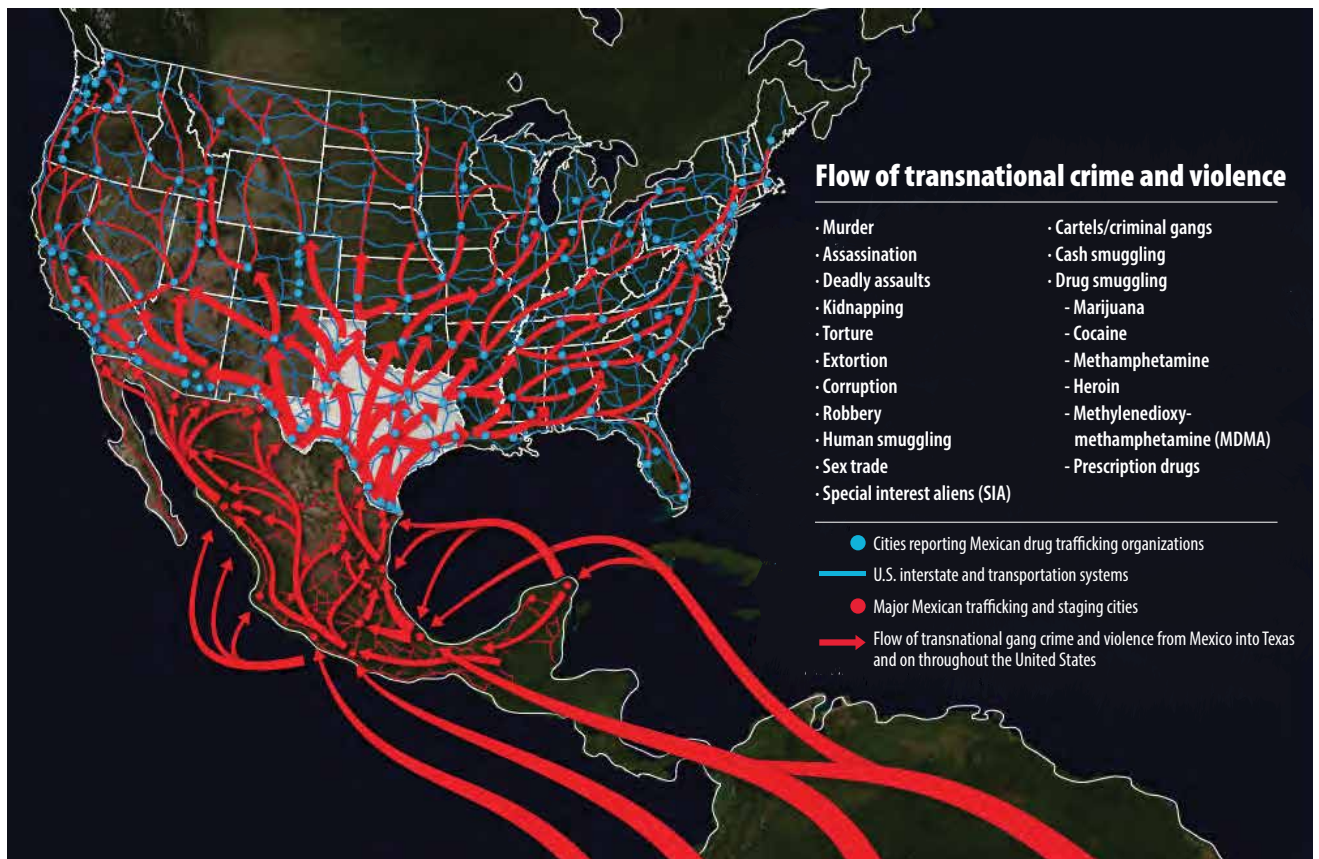
Select Current and Future Megacities 2015 to 2030

Though organized crime is not exclusively an urban phenomenon, the large masses of people who compete for jobs, services, and living spaces in the relatively congested environment of urban areas can quickly induce large-scale organized crime when the ability of governments to provide jobs and services becomes overwhelmed. Trending migration patterns suggest that, for the foreseeable future, already stressed urban areas will continue to be the preferred destination of millions of new migrants, complicating both the affected nation's ability to provide basic services as well as greatly increasing the potential for organized criminal activity. By 2030, some cities will have increased by almost a third of their current populations.

educational opportunity we should seek for any Army officer (and not just a logistician) who is involved in future initiatives, intelligence, plans, or strategy. TWI programs with Google, FedEx, and other major civilian partners provide great value to both the host organization and the Army. We should, however, not confuse their mission—profitable services and goods on a large scale—with our own, which is promoting security with limited resources and adaptive threats. Frankly, understanding the cultural pull of adobo sauce and *arroz con*

pollo (chicken with rice) may teach us almost as much as learning the intricacies of global *on-time delivery*.

Increase technical/academic skills. The Megacities Project asks, “What institutional paradigms need to change to prepare the Army to succeed in this emerging environment?”²⁰ The most important paradigm the Army can adopt is to fully dedicate itself to understanding and continually monitoring global trends to advance readiness. Today, we do not have sufficient capacity across the force to identify these trends and analyze



(Graphic from *Texas Border Security: A Strategic Military Assessment*, September 2011)

Flow of Transnational Crime and Violence

Though international crime has always been a feature of the world's economic and social system, the increased speed and volume of modern information systems and the ease by which persons and materiel can now move across borders using modern transportation have given rise to the emergence of powerful and wealthy criminal organizations that increasingly present existential threats to the sovereignty and viability of nation states themselves. In the Western Hemisphere, several Mexican states have become ungovernable as they essentially have been taken over by drug cartels; the government of El Salvador is fighting a war of survival against MS-13 (*Mara Salvatrucha*), a violent international criminal gang; and Venezuela has degenerated into a kleptocracy ruled by the deeply corrupt Venezuelan armed forces, which works in close cooperation with Colombian criminal cartels and Cuban intelligence agencies. As depicted above, the U.S. populace is increasingly a target of extensive criminal activities emanating from those and other countries in Latin America.

data. The Army has limited statisticians, economists, criminologists, political scientists, anthropologists, police intelligence experts, civil affairs/psychological operations personnel, intelligence personnel, and operations research/system analysts. Further, we have limited staff officers and noncommissioned officers to those familiar with basic data mining and research who are equipped to take the wealth of information that is available both in classified and open source arenas to better understand the world. Often, the Army contracts out such studies. When it does, we are not well equipped to gauge the quality of the work we receive. Understanding the

operating environment in great detail is a core competency that should not be outsourced.

Organize to combat criminal/hybrid threats.

Kilcullen recommends the United States make a conscious effort to close seams that hybrid threats exploit.²¹ He recommends organizing for the future with an agile and flexible structure to combat criminals, pirates, terrorists, and other threat networks:

Governments like the United States that draw sharp legislative distinctions between warfare and law enforcement, and between domestic and overseas authorities, cannot operate with

the same agility [as the threat]. Capabilities that combine policing, administration, and emergency services with sufficient military capability to deal with well-armed non-state adversaries—capabilities traditionally associated with constabulary, Gendarmerie, Carabinieri, or coast guards—are likely to be more effective against these hybrid threats than conventional armies or navies.²²

Kilcullen's force of the future blends highly trained policing and combat skills. A population-centric, stability-focused policing organization could positively influence the core of the Stability and Resilience Factor: a positive assessment of feeling safe at home at night, enabled by positive assessments of local police.

Where (Or Rather, What) Next?

International crime victimization data suggests that residents of megacities and urban areas in developing countries are no different in their reported violent crime victimization than those who live elsewhere and may have lower property crime and higher stability/resilience.²³ The overall picture for these metropolises is not particularly bleak. Regional differences appear to matter more. The implication for the U.S. military is a need to continually monitor and understand regional and global trends. The ICVS of 2000 accurately foreshadowed the previously mentioned 2018 crime epidemic in Latin America. The question becomes, was anyone in the U.S. federal government following these criminal trends with an eye to global security?

The perception of feeling safe at home at night is critical. Those who have the highest perceptions of safety also more strongly agree with assessments of the helpfulness of the police. To prepare for threats of the future, the federal government should explore population-centric approaches such as police mentorship in

order to best achieve strategic objectives in addition to threat- and terrain-centric strategies. These theories and approaches are not new. Thomas Hobbes understood the disastrous impacts of crime, opportunism, and lawlessness on society, though he lived during a major war between global powers.²⁴ Today, *The Economist* points to a major blind spot:

Murder already outpaces war as a cause of death. And the world is continuing to urbanise. India and China have accommodated huge increases in urban population while keeping violent crime levels relatively low, in part thanks to economic growth. But other countries exhibit many of the risk factors seen in Latin America a generation ago: widespread displacement as a result of conflict, millions of leftover guns, a demographic bulge, little by way of safety nets and corrupt, ineffective police forces.²⁵

The U.S. Army is wise to holistically consider crime and its impacts on security as it keeps an eye on global and regional trends. After all, ordinary crime against ordinary people on other continents may not be as scary as peer competitors, but its insidious effects negatively impact global security nonetheless.

Data analysis and original research cited in this article appeared in an unpublished work prepared for the 2016 Midwest Political Science Association's annual meeting titled, "Nasty and Brutish or Stable and Social? Perceptions of Safety in Megacities." The author acknowledges the assistance of Bob Dixon and colleagues of the Chief of Staff of the Army's Strategic Studies Group, and U.S. and international partners who shared thoughts on policing and combat operations in rural and urban environments. The opinions and analysis in this article are the author's own and do not reflect any position of the Department of the Army or Department of Defense. ■

Notes

Epigraph. "How to Cut the Murder Rate: Murder Is Set to Soar in Some Cities of the Developing World," *The Economist* (website), 5 April 2018, accessed 21 September 2018, <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2018/04/05/how-to-cut-the-murder-rate>.

Epigraph. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. C. B. Macpherson (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Classic, 1968), 337.

1. For historical background on initial revisions post-Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom, see U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) Pamphlet 525-3-1, *The U.S. Army Operating Concept: Win in a Complex World, 2020–2040* (Fort Eustis, VA: TRADOC, 31 October 2014).

2. "Shining Light on Latin America's Homicide Epidemic," *The Economist* (website), 5 April 2018, accessed

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21 September 2018, <https://www.economist.com/briefing/2018/04/05/shining-light-on-latin-americas-homicide-epidemic>.

3. David J. Kilcullen, *Out of the Mountains: The Coming Age of the Urban Guerrilla* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

4. David J. Kilcullen, "The City as a System: Future Conflict and Urban Resilience," *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* 36, no. 2 (Summer 2012): 21.

5. *Ibid.*, 22.

6. *Ibid.*

7. Chief of Staff of the Army's Strategic Studies Group, "Megacities and the United States Army: Preparing for a Complex and Uncertain Future" (Arlington, VA: Office of the Chief of Staff of the Army, June 2014), accessed 21 September 2018, <https://www.army.mil/e2/c/downloads/351235.pdf>.

8. See Eugenia K. Guilmartin, "Nasty and Brutish or Stable and Social? Perceptions of Safety in Megacities" (unpublished manuscript, April 2016), Annex C, prepared for 2016 Midwest Political Science Association's annual meeting. To illustrate, a content analysis of the document shows that there are almost twice as many references to physical terrain (i.e., "infrastructure," "building," "port") than to the human terrain (i.e., "leader," "refugee," "population").

9. Field Manual (FM) 3-0, *Operations* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office [GPO], October 2017), para. 1-4.

10. The author's search of the document for "crime," "criminal," and other derivatives. The authors of FM 3-0 acknowledge that "FM 3-0 is focused on peer threats in large-scale combat operations." *Ibid.*, para. 1-38.

11. "Shining Light on Latin America's Homicide Epidemic."

12. *Ibid.*

13. International Working Group, Anna Alvazzi del Frate, Jan J. M. van Dijk, John van Kesteren, and Pat Mayhew, *International Crime Victimization Survey (ICVS), 1989-2000*, ICPSR version (Netherlands: University of Leiden/Turin, Italy: United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute [producers], 2002; Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 2003).

14. Irshad Altheimer, "Do Guns Matter? A Multi-level Cross-National Examination of Gun Availability on Assault and Robbery Victimization," *Western Criminology Review* 9, no. 2 (2008): 15.

15. Joint Publication 3-0, *Joint Operations* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 2017), fig. V-7.

16. Strategic Studies Group, 22.

17. Lydia DePillis, "How Goya Brought Ethnic Food to White America," *Washington Post* (website), 23 August 2013, accessed 24 September 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2013/08/23/how-goya-brought-ethnic-food-to-white-america/>.

18. *Ibid.*

19. Peter Unanue, quoted in DePillis.

20. Strategic Studies Group, "Megacities and the United States Army," 22.

21. Kilcullen, "The City as a System," 32.

22. *Ibid.*

23. Guilmartin, 2016.

24. Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, s.v. "Thomas Hobbes: Moral and Political Philosophy," accessed 24 September 2018, <https://www.iep.utm.edu/hobmoral/>.

25. "Shining Light on Latin America's Homicide Epidemic."



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