

NOVEMBER 21-23, 2014

## WHO CONTROLS THE MAP? LOST INNOCENTS, PERSISTENT CRIMINALS, DEPRAVED TERRORISTS

— Michael Curtis

One of the most important political developments in recent years has been the remarkable and rapid increase in the number of non-state organizations, entities, gangs, and terror groups that play a vital role in domestic and international politics.

In short, the answer to who controls the contemporary map could be: lost innocents, persistent criminals, and depraved terrorists. Or perhaps simply put, the good, the bad, and the ugly.

Extraordinary as it may sound, there are, for example, about 27,000 non-governmental organizations that are active in many ways in public affairs.

These organizations, present in local, provincial, national, regional, and global form, are wholly or largely independent of official government agencies. They are not political parties nor commercial enterprises. Their appearance gives rise to certain questions: why have they increased? What roles do they play? Who funds them? Are they accountable in any way?

The non-state entities have appeared because of the inability of states to carry out expected functions of government, ensuring security, providing services, sanitation facilities, preventing violence, especially criminal violence, protecting property rights, preventing corruption, and upholding the law.

And then there's the bad, and the ugly. Rule-by-gun is present in Lebanon, Somalia, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone. Terrorists rule parts of countries: the Taliban in Afghanistan; Islamic State in Iraq and Syria; and Boko Haram in Nigeria.

Weak states are often corrupt as in Egypt where government and military officials own a large part of the economy while poverty prevails. Colombia cannot control the population because of left wing guerrillas (FARC) and right wing paramilitary units. In addition, Colombia has been unable to control the powerful drug lords.

In Sierra Leone, the state institutions collapsed because of civil war and conflict over extraction of minerals. In countries like Somalia and South Sudan the official government has been unable to exercise power outside of the capital, and thus there is no law, no order, and no growth in the economy. All these weak or failed states have been unable to provide necessary services.

Some problems affect all states: the international spread of diseases; increasing stridency of Islamist global jihadism; and the subordinate place of women in many countries.

Other problems are economic: the large international flow of capital leading to unstable financial systems; the drop since 2008 in the growth rates in emerging countries of the world; the flood of immigration to Western countries; the increasing inequality that has effects on the economy.

As a result, the helpful non-state actors have influenced policy (and effectively taken a share in control of the map) in a number of areas: social justice, human rights, environment, health, education, alleviation of poverty, women's rights, emergency relief (as in Haiti in 2010 or regarding the Indian Ocean Tsunami in 2004), and arms control and disarmament measures.

Groups such as Oxfam have influenced the direction of foreign aid; the Gates Foundation has promoted economic growth in poor countries; Amnesty International has pressed for human rights.

Emerging countries in Africa and South America all face difficult economic issues. Africa, in spite of its resources, in gold, ivory, and other commodities, has not developed as expected. Latin America during the last decade expanded economically and poverty was reduced, but it is troubled by slower growth, by poor bureaucracies and inadequate education, and an underground drug economy.

Political problems abound. Among them are the assertive belligerence of Russian President Vladimir Putin; a weak United Nations whose units are often biased; an ineffective European Union; the lack of action by NATO on a number of issues; the impact of globalization on the traditional system by which all states have sovereignty over their territory and uphold the principle of non-intervention in the affairs of other states.

That sovereignty has been challenged by actions of international organizations and by groups such as Islamist terrorists, drug cartels in Latin America, and crime syndicates.

The Middle East is in turmoil with the deepening of the enmity between Sunnis and Shias, the collapse of a number of nation states, really failed states, and the elimination of meaningful borders.

There are two great challenges in the area. One

is the danger of Iran, now the leading sponsor of terrorism, becoming a nuclear power. The other is the threat of non-state actors, particularly Islamist terrorism, and especially the brutal and inhumane Islamic State, a Caliphate imposing Sharia law. It is crucial that a coalition of Western and Middle Eastern countries continue the fight by military and financial methods to eliminate this brutal regime and its ideology that has attracted thousands of foreign fighters who may be, as "lone wolves," a future danger to their home countries.

Western countries, above all the US, must meet these challenges. The US must take an active lead, either directly or with a willing coalition; the EU must be invigorated to formulate a defense and foreign policy; the NATO countries must honor the amount they are supposed to spend on defense; and the so-called non-aligned countries must appreciate the dangers to their own countries as well as to the rest of the world.

In the end, the map must be regained for the good of all, or the influence of the bad and the ugly will continue to grow.

*Michael Curtis is Distinguished Professor Emeritus in political science at Rutgers University. Curtis is the author of 30 books, and was this year appointed as a Chevalier of the French Legion of Honor (Légion d'honneur). He is a Fellow at the Bosch Stiftung in Berlin.*

