

Norman, OK: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 2010

238 pages

\$34.95

## ***Gangs, Pseudo-Militaries, and Other Modern Mercenaries: New Dynamics in Uncomfortable Wars***

by Max G. Manwaring

**Reviewed by Major Jeanne F. Godfroy**, Department of Social Sciences, United States Military Academy

Since 9/11, the US military and policy communities have become more comfortable addressing the complex challenges associated with terrorism, civil war, and intervention. The adversaries whose asymmetric operations were both frustrating and daunting—terrorist and insurgent organizations—are now more familiar and manageable in the context of updated and evolving counterinsurgency and counterterrorism doctrine. In *Gangs, Pseudo-Militaries, and Other Modern Mercenaries*, Max Manwaring reintroduces another actor that necessitates attention in such conflicts—political gangs.

Manwaring's political gangs—alternately called “popular militias” and “propaganda agitator gangs”—are groups who take part in “well-calculated, multi-dimensional, and systematic attempts to coerce radical political change.” These gangs can be state-sponsored or independent actors willing to hire themselves out to the highest bidder. They can be instruments of political agents or agents of political change of their own accord. On occasion, these gangs encourage political change via both means. They have many tools at their disposal to accomplish their political objectives: subversion of the state, humanitarian assistance, intimidation of the local population, demonstrations, strikes, riots, and armed resistance. Like insurgent and terrorist organizations, political gangs have a protean nature; their purpose, hierarchy, and operations can shift to meet the requirements of dynamic political and military situations. Their ability to adapt makes the challenges they present to state political legitimacy all the more demanding. What distinguishes these popular militias from insurgent or terrorist organizations, however, is that the political change they aim to encourage may not be regime change or establishment of a separate state; rather, these political gangs sometimes seek to subvert the political legitimacy of the state just enough to maintain “acceptable” levels of instability conducive to the social, political, and economic goals of their sponsors.

Throughout his analysis of political gang activity, Manwaring demonstrates a substantial depth of knowledge about the dynamics of civil war and 4th and 5th generation warfare. His analysis of this type of conflict, however, apart from the focus on political gangs as unique from terrorist or insurgent organizations, is not particularly new or startling. Drawing from strategists ranging from Sun Tzu to Lenin to Simón Bolívar, Manwaring builds his framework for understanding and countering political gangs within established tenets of revolutionary warfare, counterinsurgency, and democratic transitions theory.

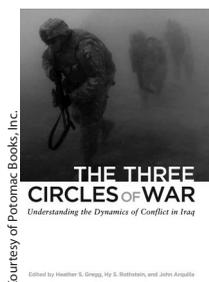
He identifies political gangs and their sponsors as competitors with the state for political legitimacy among the population. The author notes that weak or weakening state institutions control and create space for nonstate actors of this nature to develop and flourish. Manwaring highlights the importance of understanding and seizing control of human terrain in addition to physical terrain as a means of countering political gangs. Finally, he emphasizes the importance of unity of command between state security institutions and intervention forces to balance persuasive and coercive measures to restore state political legitimacy.

Manwaring's somewhat disparate case studies, too, make the book read more like an anthology of gang activity rather than a qualitative analysis of political gangs and state failure. He begins with a comparison of the *posses* of Jamaica and Hizballah in southern Lebanon as examples of political gangs who assume governance responsibilities in the absence of strong governments. He continues with a description of the Argentine *piqueteros*, which he aptly calls "rent-a-mobs" who are used to further political elite objectives in Argentina. Manwaring then transitions to the more complex conflict of Colombia and the United Self-Defense Groups of Colombia (AUC). These so-called "protagonists" in the conflict are characterized as agents supporting the goals of Colombia's political elites and the narcotics industry, often at the expense of the state and, occasionally, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Manwaring subsequently gives Hugo Chávez an honorable mention for first mobilizing and then harnessing his popular militias in Venezuela to further his own personal political objectives.

It is at this point in the story that Manwaring's focus shifts from purely political gangs to an interesting mix of terrorists, transnational criminal organizations (TCOs), and more mercenary entities. He describes al Qaeda's use of subversive agents—termed as a "small body of propagandists and agitators"—to mobilize support for al Qaeda in Western Europe while simultaneously undermining Western governments like Spain. His final case study, Mexico, seems a little out of place in a collection of mostly politically oriented groups. The Zetas, for example, appear to behave more like a private military company than a popular militia; they serve as "guns for hire" to further what are probably more economic than political objectives of various Mexican drug cartels. Manwaring's assertions about the political goals of the cartels and groups like the Zetas to completely subvert the state seem a bit of a stretch; it is, perhaps, more likely that too much instability or complete subversion could prove untenable for the cartels, their logistics lines, and the narcotics market that sustains them.

Despite these small discrepancies, Manwaring's book contains rich descriptions of unique actors in diverse and unusual case studies. His framework and case analysis provides a comprehensive view of existing knowledge about civil war and counterinsurgency from the perspective of some distinctive theorists. His description of gangs as agents of political change also furthers our notions of knowledge-based war—the idea that managing conflicts and actors like these requires thoughtful, adaptable policymakers and warriors prepared to address both armed and political resistance in areas where the lines between

crime, terrorism, insurgency, and traditional warfare are blurred. Thus, his work provides the reader with a detailed portrayal of the probable future of intrastate conflict, internationalized civil war, and intervention. Although at times overly verbose and difficult to read, this book is appropriate for national security strategists and military leaders who see on the horizon a shift in US interventions from large-scale operations in Iraq and Afghanistan to a smaller footprint in regions of South America, Latin America, the Horn of Africa and, possibly, Mexico. Manwaring's book raises awareness about these actors and the changing international environment—an important contribution as we prepare for new and more varied security challenges.



Dulles, Virginia:  
Potomac Books,  
Inc., 2010

272 pages

\$60.00

## ***The Three Circles of War: Understanding the Dynamics of Conflict in Iraq***

by Heather S. Gregg, Hy S. Rothstein, and John Arquilla

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As American involvement in Iraq decreases, it is only natural that scholars and policy practitioners will increasingly examine the “big questions” that hover over the American-led endeavor in that country: what type of conflict was (is) it; how do we understand the causes and effects of the direction of conflict; what can be done to mitigate policy failures in Iraq with an eye towards the future? The coeditors of *The Three Circles of War*, Heather Gregg, Hy Rothstein, and John Arquilla, attempt to address these and other “big questions” that will dominate the analysis of the conflict for years to come. By incorporating contributions from academic fields as disparate as economics, ethics, the Internet, and systems dynamics, the coeditors (and the contributors of each chapter) have embraced a significant multidisciplinary approach to examining Operation Iraqi Freedom. The multidisciplinary flavor of *The Three Circles of War* is its greatest asset, and like any worthwhile intellectual endeavor, it addresses many of these “big questions,” yet sets the conditions for the genesis of further scholarship related to even more questions that arise when studying the evolving nature of conflict in the 21st Century.

At its most elemental level, *The Three Circles of War* argues that the conflict in Iraq consisted of three types of war (interstate conflict, insurgency, and civil war), and that a solid, comprehensive study of the changing nature and dynamics of Iraq can only be achieved through an interdisciplinary analysis of the conflict. This interdisciplinary approach is applied through six sections, consisting of fourteen chapters, each with a unique perspective on the conflict.

Chapters effectively build upon the theoretical framework established by the coeditors, and brilliantly weave the three categories of conflict into their presentation. Tarek Abdel-Hamid's chapter on the application of systems dynamics modeling to the Iraq war stands out in this regard; his use of social contagion