Global Black Spots© Approach
- **White Paper** -
Dr. Bartosz Hieronim Stanisławski
Research Associate, Moynihan Institute of Global Affairs
Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs
Syracuse University

John A. (Jake) Conway
LTC, U.S. Army
Army Fellow

"You may be looking for a fish. We may be able to tell you where it might be found."

INTRODUCTION

Social network analysis approaches focus on following the proverbial fish and/or analyzing its connections to other actors. But a good fisherman does not jump into water chasing a particular fish. A good fisherman knows where to cast the nets. This is the basis of our approach and the philosophy behind our research.

ENTER: Black Spots© - Redrawing the Maps of the World

No area around the world is ungoverned; it may not be controlled by a recognized government, but it certainly is governed by a social structure of some sort (it could, for instance, be an organized crime group, a warlord, or a terrorist organization). Interchangeable use of terms such as "weak states", "failed states", "failing states", "ungoverned territories" or others like that is misleading and imprecise and, importantly, may lead to flawed assumptions on the part of decision- and policy-makers.

In the course of the Global Black Spots-Mapping Global Insecurity (GBS-MGI) Program, we re-draw maps of the world attempting to look through the eyes of criminals/terrorists, based on their perceptions of areas of operations, turfs, or Black Spots. The reason is that the law-abiding citizens see the political maps of the world in a very different way than the criminals and terrorists do. Law-abiding citizens recognize international frontiers and, mostly, respect them. Global criminals and terrorists see international frontiers as lines of opportunity, significant legal or price differentials. They see them as the boundaries of the law enforcement and intelligence agencies' zones of influence, as aerial markers of safe havens. Global criminals and terrorists use international frontiers to run and hide behind them out of the reach of justice, to regroup, and to conduct their operations further.

But global criminals and terrorists do see different frontiers than those delineated by international border lines. They see the areas of criminal turfs, of organized criminal influence

zones, of neutral points in different locations around the world, and of safe havens where negotiations with other crime or terrorist groups may take place. For example, within the Horn of Africa the international boundaries (clean lines on a map) portray a false sense of security, since most politics in Africa is local and ethnic boundaries trump the political ones.

THE GLOBAL ASPECT

National or regional specialization in security analysis is an important asset in any analysis. However, it should not take precedence over the understanding of transnational issues that inevitably cut across regional and national boundaries. The moment a specialist sees only his or her area of responsibility and does not communicate in an effective and timely manner with the specialist in the area "across the border", the analysis and policy-making community is likely to be left with only a piece of the puzzle, which very often may be global in scope. Thus, global outlook as transnational issues is not only important – it is critical. It is for that reason that we look at Black Spots in a global scope; their interactions and, most importantly, their impact is very often global. Take the example of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan (known as the FATA). Big chunk of the 9/11 attacks took place in that area or was connected to that area. Yet a country specialist on Pakistan may have had only a partial picture of what is happening in that country, since Afghanistan's territory played a huge part in that process as well. The impact of what was planned in the FATA and in Afghanistan reached far beyond the country or regional level – it reached another continent, a location literally on the other side of the world. Global outlook is critical; anything less than that without the global reference and understanding may simply be futile.

MISSION

The mission of the GBS-MGI Program is to gather data on and conduct analysis of areas that are perceived to be critical nodes in underworld webs. By looking at them and tracking insecurity flows that run through them, it is possible to better understand the global underworld, its interactions, actors, and - most importantly - insecurity that may be generated and exported to other locations.

The Intelligence Community (IC) inevitably has to prioritize its focus points based on its available resources and requirements of decision makers at the given moment. Our mission and goal is to gather open source information and monitor all potential Black Spots in order to be better able to track and, in the future, contribute to early warning about potential insecurity flows and impending threats. The GBS-MGI program may therefore be perceived as an intelligence support activity that through research and analysis can provide real-time crisis support, enable new and unique insights, "tip" other intelligence collection, "cue" further classified research and analysis, and lead to the discovery of new requirements within the IC and Law Enforcement organizations.

THE TERM AND ITS DEFINITION

We define Black Spots as parts of the world that are:
1) outside of effective governmental control
2) controlled by alternative, mostly illicit, social structures, and
3) capable of breeding and exportation of insecurity (e.g., illicit drugs, conventional weapons, terrorist operatives, illicit financial flows, strategic/sensitive know-how etc.) to faraway locations

Similarly to the astronomical notion of black holes that are invisible unless detected due to gravity anomalies surrounding them, we scan the world for Black Spots by following and analyzing anomalous security events and processes. Based on open-source information we research and analyze suspect areas, offering holistic assessments of Black Spots to aid in understanding of our most difficult transnational and national security challenges.

It is important to emphasize that Black Spots **are not** the same as failed, failing, or weak states and certainly should not be classified or perceived as ungoverned territories (since they do have governance structures, albeit not formal). Black Spots may, however, be located within any of the aforementioned entities/territories and it is our task to scan for them, pinpoint them, and monitor them.

Black Spots constitute a considerable security challenge because they are largely invisible to the outside world. Our project discovers Black Spots through the triangulation of data regarding anomalous events and transfers in particular regions of the globe. Consider several examples: the Federally Administered Tribal Areas that are formally part of Pakistan but are most likely the current home of Osama bin Laden and the leadership of al-Qaeda, elements of the Taliban, and various insurgent groups. Parts of South Ossetia, a contested part of the state of Georgia and the place where the Georgians and Russians clashed militarily in August of 2008, is another such area. And the St. Regis/Akwesasne Mohawk Reservation that crosses the border between the State of New York and Ontario/Quebec is still another example that is outside the effective government control of either country and facilitates the smuggling of illicit products and people through the border without being detected.

ONGOING RESEARCH AND MONITORING

To date we have identified over 100 and mapped 60 such Black Spots in all regions of the world and begun to assess the types of interactions going on in these areas as well as the various kinds of insecurity that they are exporting and the directions in which it is or may be going. We continually scan the globe for other areas where conditions seem right for the presence of a Black Spot. Using published materials, news-scanning software, formal and informal interviews, and, where feasible, visits to the areas, we piece together a picture of the Global Black Spots, their nature, and their interactions with the outside world.

Our research so far suggests that Black Spots potentially serve as nodes for a global network of transnational criminals and terrorists. We believe that transnational vicious non-state actors use Black Spots as locations between which they can operate undisturbed and out of sight of international law enforcement, intelligence, and security agencies. What they transfer in, out, and between Black Spots are **insecurity flows**, defined as movements of assets, people, services, or sensitive know-how in pursuit of illicit criminal or political gain, and with intention of evading law enforcement, intelligence, and related national and international agencies.

Some examples of Global Black Spots that we have been analyzing and monitoring include areas around:

North America:
- Tohono O'odham
- Chetumal

South America:
- Tri-Border area (Southern Cone)
- Darien jungle

Europe:
- Scampia and Secondigliano
- Transniestria

Africa:
- Goma (DRC)
- Gharb Darfur

Middle East:
- Sections of the Sinai Peninsula
- Bekaa Valley

Asia:
- FATA
- Ferghana Valley

Being able to pinpoint and monitor Black Spots on an ongoing basis offers the possibility of tracking the movement of criminals and terrorists, their financial assets and illegal weapons, and their skills and expertise. Such a capability is critical to intelligence gathering and necessary precondition for **threat interception** and the prevention of the **escalation of insecurity**.

CASTING EARLY WARNING NETS

The end goal of the GBS-MGI Program is to be able to pinpoint and monitor as many of the globe's Black Spots, as possible. It is important to keep in mind that the Black Spots global picture is not static; some Black Spots pulse, others remain fairly constant over time, still others appear for a while and disappear for longer periods of time. The bottom line is that Black Spots are spaces composed of social, political, economic, and force (military or other) conditions, which coincide in a specific time in a specific place and in a specific environment. Locating them, keeping them under close observation, and analyzing insecurity generation and exportation from them to other locations may offer intelligence, security, and law enforcement organizations and agencies significant insight into the bloodline of the global underworld. Knowing in timely

manner the threats that are being generated and the direction of their flow may offer the basis for forecasting their destinations or targets. Such information may clearly also constitute the basis of the window of opportunity for action and threat interception.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on research conducted so far, this project aims to detect, map, and analyze Black Spot areas, seeking to understand the ways in which they export insecurity. We aim to develop an early warning system for alerting governments and international organizations of possible dangers, and to provide guidance on how Black Spots may be managed to prevent or minimize the harm they may cause. The bottom line is this: criminal and terrorists, or simply "global bads", use different maps of the world from the ones that law-abiding citizens do. We need to understand those maps and understand some of the key nodes in which some connections, insecurity flows, information exchange, and other illicit activities take place: we need to locate, continually observe, and understand what is happening within Black Spots. The Global Black Spots-Mapping Global Insecurity Program focuses on those very tasks.

CONTACT:

Global Black Spots-Mapping Global Insecurity Program
Moynihan Institute of Global Affairs and Institute for National Security and Counterterrorism

Dr. Bartosz Hieronim Stanisławski, Program Director
Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs
Syracuse University
346G Eggers Hall
Syracuse, New York 13244-1020

E-mail: bstanisl@maxwell.syr.edu