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# Violent Non-state Actors in 2030: Suggested Dutch Armed Forces Response

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# Violent non-state actors in 2030: suggested Dutch armed forces response

Presentation by Dr Robert Bunker

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## Introduction

Today's main threat comes from non-state actors that cause friction and disruption within the system. These non-state groups challenge the values, social and political nature of our nation-state and provide

a major challenge which means that in essence we are fighting today over our future state form. Possibly, we face the current meltdown of old structures and the rise of new ones; these new structures can be legitimate (the European Union) or illegitimate (mafia states).



## Disruption is the main objective for non-state actors

The nation-state is in transition and challenged by non-state actors and groups such as illegitimate states, para-states, terrorists, pirates, organised crime, mercenaries, insurgents. These non-state actors operate very often in a professional manner, which is, for example, the case with street gangs. Non-state actors evolve quickly and blend in easily with other non-state groups. The main objective and the force of these non-state groups is their disruptive combat power. They aim at undermining the status quo of a society or order. During the Vietnam war the United States was militarily superior, but the Viet Cong won because of its constant disruption of people, government and military. Future analyses should take into account that non-state actors adapt quicker to new circumstances than conventional armed forces. Fighting, for example, the influence of street gangs could mean that slums will be one of our future battlegrounds: this could result in a high dimensionality warfare in which laser systems, space (non-state actors might be able to rent satellite capabilities), and virtual reality could play a role.

The global transition starting twenty years ago has caused a strategic problem. This transition is marked by continuity, discontinuity, grey areas and failed states. The transformation of war (or fourth generation war) is marked by a capability gap. As history shows during a transition phase new and old weaponry systems exist side by side and mercenary and private military companies flourish well. Nowadays, due to the deinstitutionalization, privatization and outsourcing, there is a growing importance of mercenaries. Outsourcing is not necessarily a negative development, notably if the state is able to loosely

incorporate or ensure a linkage with these non-state actors. Mercenaries - very often former officers or former Special Forces - could challenge the state structure if in the future they lose obedience. Mercenaries could turn out to be a new sort of criminal soldier.

## Which role for the Netherlands armed forces?

To respond to the current transition phase, the Netherlands army has to plan for conventional and unconventional combat. It should consist of a light conventional force that plans in the short term for unrestricted challenges, irregular threats and combat with non-state actors. In the long run the army should plan for conventional post-modern warfare (between states). All military planning among the different branches (air, navy, land, marechaussee) should study and analyze the evolution of these national and international non-state actors. The overlap and synergy between crime and war and the growing numbers of failed communities and failed states (the "haves" and "haves not") will continue to form a great source of conflict on a social and political level.