

Chapter 10

The Geopolitics of Organized Crime in World Order 2.0: A Case Study*

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Abstract: This chapter aims to provide a broad analysis of the actors and factors involved in instability operations in World Order 2.0. It also examines and identifies specific characteristics and elements that contribute to the development of instability operations, especially those originating in the Northern Andean Security Subcomplex, and how their externalities affect the international system at a regional level. To achieve this, transnational illicit activities are contextualized as a factor that generates instability, and the role of the Andean-Amazonian region in these dynamics is also explored.

Palabras clave: threats; instability factors; transnational illicit activities; instability operations; security.

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Introduction

In the traditional sense, the international system refers to the collection of political entities that maintain regular relations with each other and are ultimately vulnerable to involvement in a widespread war (Aron, 1963). However, nearly thirty years after the end of the Cold War and the bipolar rigidity, many uncertainties still exist about the nature of the current international system.

Therefore, in this complex system where the fates of its actors are interconnected within a context conducive to diverse connections, we are led to a scenario that remains unpredictable and open to new possibilities. Among these is the task of establishing a security agenda better suited to the new times and priorities of international relations, even in South America.

In other words, as Queiroz (2022) points out, overlapping threats from both outside and within a region require coordinated responses to safeguard the interests of those affected by externalities caused by issues like environmental degradation, climate change, conflict-induced forced displacement, radicalization and terrorist financing, large-scale cyberattacks, deliberate violence by non-state actors, and, for this research, the spread of failed States and organized crime.

This interpretation is based on Haass (2008), who describes the current international system as “the age of nonpolarity,” a world where no single group of States dominates. Instead, numerous actors, many non-state and possessing substantial power, influence the global landscape. In this context, Haass characterizes nonpolarity—evident in this spread of power—as the defining feature of the 21st-century international system; he describes it as a major shift away from the traditional systemic views of the recent past.

In Haass’s nonpolar system, state power is weakened as cross-border flows of various kinds (drugs, information, weapons, goods, people) happen beyond

the government's knowledge and control. As a result, these flows enable other actors to take actions in spaces that were once the exclusive domain of the State. Therefore, the nonpolar world could lead to a dangerous situation, prone to "nonpolar disorder," with growing threats and vulnerabilities.

From another perspective, Viola and Leis (2007) argue that we have lived within what they call an international system dominated by market democracies, and that its core structural force is globalization, characterized by the shift from an industrial society to a knowledge-based, information-driven society.

In this scenario, the main state actors that connect free-market economies and democratic regimes define their foreign and defense policies so that they do not pose, relative to any other country in this context, threats to their vital interests. Therefore, it is important to highlight that Viola and Leis (2007) define democratic regimes as those characterized by the existence of the rule of law, free and competitive elections, clear differentiation between government and opposition, alternation in power, individual rights and guarantees vis-à-vis the State, separation of powers, constitutional guarantees for minorities, and protection of society against the possible excessive appropriation of resources by the political class.

Based on this, the authors identify the main threats to the current international security system as: 1) transnational terrorism linked to Islamic radicalism; 2) the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; 3) States that actively challenge this security framework, such as Iran and North Korea; 4) States that partially challenge this system and have significant power resources, like China and Russia; and 5) transnational crime.

In turn, Zakaria (2008) emphasizes that the dynamics of the international system are shaped by what he calls the "rise of the rest." While, in his view, the world remains unipolar at the political-military level under American dominance, there is a notable shift in other areas—industrial, economic, financial, social, and cultural—favoring other powers, especially China and India, as well as non-state actors. This suggests an overlap of elements of unipolarity and multipolarity.

In short, these readings confirm the conclusions of a 2004 report by a commission of experts appointed by Kofi Annan, then Secretary-General of the United Nations (UN), which identified six main sources of threats or challenges to the contemporary security agenda: 1) wars between States; 2) violence within States, civil wars, large-scale human rights violations, and genocide; 3) poverty, infectious diseases, and environmental degradation; 4) nuclear, radiological, chemical, and biological weapons; 5) terrorism; and 6) transnational organized crime (TOC).

These approaches, which represent only a small sample of the efforts to interpret international relations in the first decade of the 21st century, indicate the reorganization of forces in the modern international system at various levels of analysis, from the systemic to the regional. And, within that system, transnational crime, as we have seen, helps create scenarios of instability whose external impacts are not fully understood in terms of their ability to cause disruptions.

In other words, as Zakaria (2008) rightly observes, this new global reality, profoundly changed by the inclusion of unconventional issues on the international security agenda and the increasing involvement of non-state actors, emphasizes the urgent need “to construct a new approach for a new era, one that responds to a global system in which power is far more diffuse than ever before and in which everyone feels empowered.” We are moving away from a bipolar and dangerous, yet predictable, world based on the known risk of a contest between two adversaries, toward a different one with unclear boundaries. This new world presents old risks but also offers unprecedented opportunities (Queiroz, 2013). It is World Order 2.0!

The above becomes clearer when we also consider the perspective of Buzan and Waever (2003), who state that, in the post-Cold War era, the regional sphere is the space where the dynamics of insecurity—resulting from the interactions between various actors and sectors—are most clearly and immediately evident. Regarding South America, the same authors note that while the Southern Cone has pursued integration and strengthened mutual trust with Mercosur as its foundation since the 1990s, the Andean-Amazonian North—our area of focus—still carries lingering remnants of past conflicts and rivalries, in a scenario worsened by endemic structural issues.

Thus, in a time of increasing instability and many uncertainties about the future of the global order, we uphold this direct relational hypothesis: the more transnational the illicit activities are, the higher the chance that the so-called Northern Andean Security Subcomplex, especially the Andean-Amazonian area, will become a dangerous zone characterized by fragility in the rule of law and the economy of illegal activities.

Methodology

To gather the data needed to test the hypothesis, we used desk research, a method that involves a thorough review of published materials related to the study subject. For this purpose, we examined documents from relevant official public sources

(such as ministries, Armed Forces, and intelligence agencies) as well as media outlets like newspapers, magazines, and specialized websites.

Regarding the research ontology, we selected instability dynamics within the framework of World Order 2.0 as a key parameter to define the universe of analysis. Additionally, we employed the descriptive model of Regional Security Complexes (RSCs) in general and Regional Security Subcomplexes (RSSs) in particular, which are explained in the section dedicated to the conceptual framework.

Therefore, this case study employed a qualitative methodology to answer the research questions. An analysis was conducted to provide descriptive (how) and causal (why) inferences about the geopolitics of organized crime in the northern tri-border region (Brazil-Colombia-Peru), which we understand as part of an ongoing Andean-Amazonian Instability Arc.

This work is also an exploratory study, given the nature of the research subject, which is a rare topic in the literature, especially in its interpretation through the chosen conceptual frameworks.

Finally, to answer the research question and determine whether the proposed hypothesis is supported or refuted, a causal chain is used that outlines the variables chosen for the study, which are: 1) the independent variables, those that influence other variables and are useful for explaining the characteristics or behavior of the study object; 2) the dependent variable, which the researcher aims to explain based on the influence of one or more independent variables; and 3) the intervening variable, which, in a causal sequence, is positioned between the independent and dependent variables, helping to explain how the former affects the latter.

World Order 2.0

According to Richard Haass (2017), we no longer live in World Order 1.0, which was based on the exclusive protection and privileges of States since the Peace of Westphalia (1648), but instead in an integrated and interdependent world, or, in other words, World Order 2.0. In this scenario, nearly everything—including threats and people—can reach anywhere, creating complex interdependent relationships. Therefore, in World Order 2.0, “what goes on inside a country can no longer be considered the concern of that country alone” (Haass, 2017, p. 2), meaning that overlapping threats from outside and within a given region or country require coordinated responses to protect the interests of those affected by the externalities.

The situation involves illicit activities infiltrating numerous state institutions, including those in South America, facilitated by TOC. This phenomenon is supported by some elements that define World Order 2.0, such as trade liberalization, the movement of goods and people, technological progress, and the transit of non-state actors who promote these products—factors that create cycles of instability and pose challenges to the rule of law, as discussed in the following section.

The international landscape is shaped by interdependence, a phenomenon that has been critically reflected in the various threats currently facing nations. As noted, although war in its traditional Westphalian form is declining, it has not prevented terrorist acts such as the attacks in New York and Washington, D.C., on September 11, 2001, from happening. This shows “a growing deterritorialization of violence and a significant secularization of the international agenda. It has also gained renewed importance with the large terrorist activities carried out by the Islamic State in the Middle East and, most notably, in Europe” (Riquelme et al., 2019).

It is important to remember that traditional and interstate conflicts still exist in the global environment, phenomena that are examined through various security dilemmas in Asia and the Middle East, such as the unstable and complex situations involving the two Koreas, Japan and China, China and Russia, Pakistan and India, and India and China (Tokatlian, 2012). These conflicts are also evident in the current complex and critical crisis between Russia and Ukraine, which began on the morning of February 24, 2022, when Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered his troops to bomb and invade the neighboring country.

In this environment of interdependence between regional frameworks, it has been observed that state and non-state actors face numerous difficulties in addressing the wide range of demands and challenges brought about by globalization, especially regarding security issues. It is important to note that new threats are emerging, with transnational illicit groups, environmental degradation, and natural disasters becoming increasingly significant. In Latin America, security remains a top priority for both societies and governments, which is why studying and analyzing TOC in this region is considered so important.

Transnational Organized Crime in World Order 2.0

Organized crime is involved in various aspects of society. We suggest that these relationships extend beyond citizens and the government, even across borders, and have a significant impact on security. As the Organization of American States points out (OEA, 2003),

[...] the concept of security, which was once framed primarily in conventional military terms, has now had to broaden its framework and take into account a variety of threats: international terrorism, drug and illegal arms trafficking, human trafficking, money laundering, institutional corruption, and organized crime. In some countries, poverty, disease, and environmental degradation contribute to the deterioration of human security. (p. 106)

This happens through the creation of a vicious circle, as Cuervo (2018) suggests, which forms networks of interdependence capable of structurally undermining countries and/or regions (Figure 1).

Figure 1. *The Modus Operandi of Transnational Crimes*



Source: Cuervo (2018).

Certainly, the instability caused by organized crime, which still persists, is a major concern for political development, especially when society believes that worsening security is only due to economic decline (Wielandt, 2007).

The actions of organized crime do not distinguish between national political systems, between actors and their relationships, much less do they recognize or take into account an international political system, where the variety of actors, the lack of laws regulating their interactions, the significant asymmetry of power, and the transnational nature of their actions tend to increase and become harder to interpret. To support this view, it should be noted that the world order and its actors, mechanisms, and systems can seem somewhat abstract if they are not analyzed from a global perspective, and a causal analysis is not constructed in a way that bridges the gaps between nations involved in developing illicit activities (Parrao, 2018).

Transnational crime usually involves organizations or individuals that operate sporadically and use self-regulating mechanisms. In his article, Szeinfeld (2012) states that the goal of this type of threat is to make money or gain commercial profit through partly or fully illegal means.

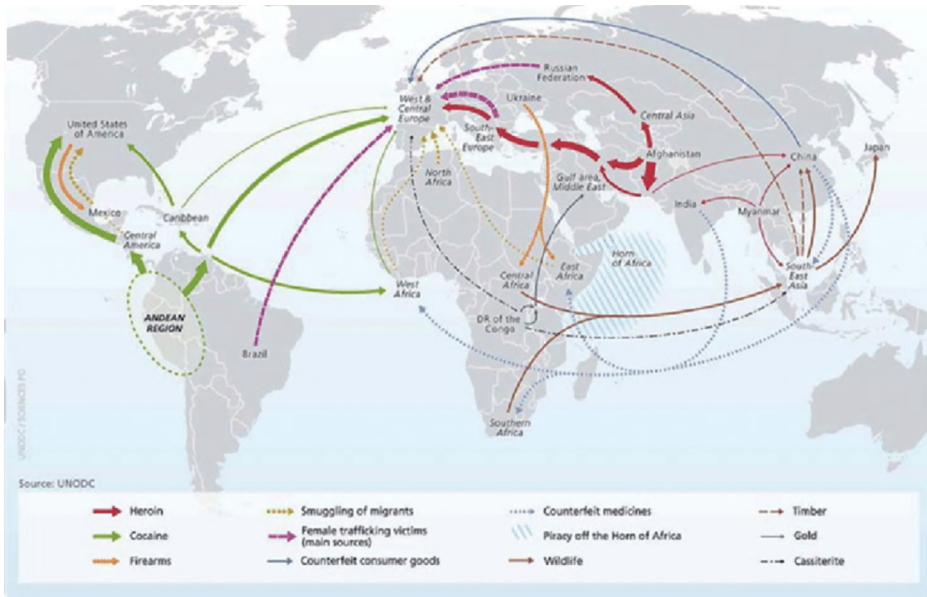
Therefore, William Werner (2009) categorizes TOC from three perspectives: 1) political, which views organized crime as a result of weakened state structures; 2) social, which emphasizes sociocultural factors as determinants of TOC methods; and 3) economic, which explains the methods based on the demand for illegal goods and services.

In its own turn, World Order 2.0 emerged at the end of the last decade of the 20th century, a period when new ideas and technologies were introduced into politics, commerce, and the global economy. In this context, a new organized crime structure has emerged in cyberspace, an electronic marketplace where illicit goods and services are sold, and sometimes businesses are infiltrated, all without physical contact between supplier and customer. This dynamic, in turn, makes fighting criminal networks a more complex task, especially in regions like the Andean-Amazonian area, where notable state weaknesses threaten regional stability (Figure 2).

Therefore, in World Order 2.0, responses must be coordinated and integrated across the broadest range of action spheres, at both the intra- and inter-state levels, to maximize the ability to create lasting impacts in pursuit of: 1) efforts to modernize and fight corruption; 2) reducing illicit finance; 3) strengthening regional multilateral anti-corruption frameworks; and 4) enhancing diplomatic

engagement to achieve anti-corruption policy goals, which will only be feasible through intersectoral governance, as we suggest below.

Figure 2. *Transnational Organized Crime Market Flows*



Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2010, p. 2).

These events, along with many others that will be analyzed later, have led criminal actors to adopt this development and escalate their actions, making it clear that the history of crime, like that of politics and the economy, has evolved.

Considering the challenges arising from the new world order, the reconfiguration of threats, and the ongoing conflicts in South America due to the instability caused by TOC, it is essential to analyze which actors are primarily responsible for these threats, to eventually identify them and develop the most effective strategy to counter them.

Research Universe and the Theory of Regional Security Complexes

In today's world, the issue of international security has become more significant globally, not just in politics but also within various academic circles, which have

called for expanding and deepening it to better suit the complex nature of an order filled with many uncertainties. In this context, the Copenhagen Peace Research Institute (COPRI), established in 1985, stands out. It has contributed significantly by introducing the concept of *securitization*, which expands the idea of security and is based on the premise that threats are not only military but also can originate from political, environmental, economic, and social spheres, each with its own unique dynamics.

For the Institute's experts, the regional level has greater visibility because, beyond the bipolar rivalry context, local powers have more room to maneuver, and regional differences—particularly States' concerns about their neighbors' interests and intentions—have become easier to distinguish from the systemic security agenda of the Cold War.

In this regard, another original and important contribution of this Institute is the descriptive model of RSCs. Its basic premise, as stated, is that, in the post-Cold War world, international relations in the field of security lead to greater autonomy and importance of the dynamics occurring on a regional scale.

The main idea is that an RSC exists when perceptions and concerns about the security of people within a geographically connected area are so linked that these issues cannot easily be analyzed or solved separately. According to Buzan and Waever (2003), South America fits this situation, and for this research, the Andean-Amazonian arc is also relevant.

Thus, RSCs are social constructs based on the interdependence relationships established between their units through interactions of material variables and ideas, such as beliefs, identities, material capabilities, borders, power distribution/perception, and anarchy. These factors give the model greater analytical depth. Within this framework, South America has two subregional structures: the Southern Cone Security Subcomplex, which includes Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay, and the Northern Andean Security Subcomplex, comprising Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, and Guyana. In this context, Brazil acts indirectly as a connecting country between the two subcomplexes because of its size and because it is both Amazonian and Andean.

The South American Regional Security Complex

South America has advanced in its security cooperation efforts through the creation of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), which now forms a regional bloc including all South American countries. Key reasons for its

establishment include the gradual decline in the effectiveness and consensus of the current inter-American system, as well as the significant weakening of traditional regional integration centers in South America: the Andean Community (CAN) and the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) (Cujabante, 2012).

Thus, South America looked for multilateral regional options to fight and counter transnational criminal groups while also strengthening unity and cooperation among countries, as was shown on other continents. UNASUR gained the reputation of a new regionalism, setting itself apart from those that appeared in the 1970s. In this regard,

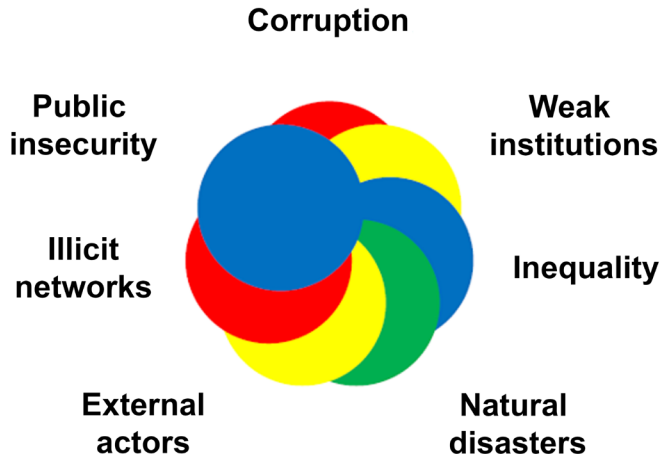
[...] On December 8, 2004, the South American Community was established. Following the Margarita Island Summit in April 2007, its name was changed to its current name, UNASUR, which was formalized in the Treaty of Brasilia, signed on May 23, 2008. (Cujabante, 2012, p. 70)

UNASUR plays a vital role in regional security, as shown by an analysis of the security threat actors present in this geographic area since the end of the Cold War. In this context, as noted in the definition of World Order 2.0, South America is immersed in an environment where States no longer act alone, and the influence of multiple transnational actors is clear. In response to these global changes, the concept of security has evolved in at least three ways (Hurrell, 1998, as cited in Cujabante, 2012):

1) The State is no longer the only reference point for security; instead, it must include individuals, communities, humanity as a whole, people in general, the biosphere, and others. 2) Any meaningful analysis of security must consider a wider range of threats, including those from environmental destruction, economic vulnerabilities, and the breakdown of social cohesion. 3) The responsibility for providing security falls not only on the State but also on international institutions and non-governmental organizations. (p. 26)

Therefore, it is evident that among the factors contributing to violence and territorial instability—such as terrorism, organized crime, drug trafficking, corruption, arms trafficking, extreme poverty, and natural disasters—these are beginning to become more prominent, especially in what we refer to as the Andean-Amazonian Arc of Instability. Consequently, the subregion faces a series of interconnected factors that form a vicious cycle, as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. *Vicious Cycle of Andean-Amazonian Threats*



Source: Own elaboration.

Therefore, regarding the specific issue of South America, the threats that arise are shaped by particular geographic conditions, natural resources, the political environment, and, in some cases, historical processes, among other factors. In short, new actors are committing crimes in border areas and transnationalizing their actions, for example, through transnational migrations driven by violence and the illegal trade of weapons, drugs, people, environmental resources, and more.

The actions of illicit groups along the northern tri-border (Colombia, Brazil, and Peru)—which we recognize as a key part of the Andean-Amazonian Arc of Instability—have been changing over time. At first, they only aimed to show local control. But as they grew, they first demonstrated their strength and took on more aggressive territorial control within these countries. Eventually, they moved into a realm of criminal transnationalization, occupying large cross-border areas, as is the case now.

Identifying these criminal groups was challenging because the State showed little interest in the issue; it was not a priority in its government policies, and it was believed they did not threaten its stability. As a result, TOC became rooted in gray areas like the Amazonian Trapeze, where government neglect created empty spaces that allowed their expansion and growth in power. To achieve this, these criminal organizations infiltrate institutional structures to control border crossings and strengthen their influence. The truth is, as Procópio (2007), Cuervo (2018), and Queiroz (2022) pointed out, that the Andean-Amazonian region has increasingly

played a significant role in the network of exchanges and cooperation among organized crime groups.

The Northern Andean Security Subcomplex

While the Southern Cone has chosen the path of integration and building mutual trust, the Northern Andean Security Subcomplex, in contrast, still carries underlying remnants of a history of conflict and rivalry. This situation is worsened by structural issues that go beyond the borders of the Subcomplex. Resentments from territorial disputes of the 19th and 20th centuries involving Peru, Bolivia, Chile, Venezuela, Colombia, Guyana, and Ecuador still linger (Buzan & Waever, 2003).

Furthermore, the significant political and institutional weaknesses present in the Subcomplex are among the main reasons for the power vacuum that characterizes the region. This vacuum has been filled by organized crime networks, which are responsible for the subregion's integration into the competitive global illicit market. Therefore, given the systemic weaknesses common to the Andean States, the state-building process is a vital aspect of security, an essential element for maintaining regional order in a context where the presence of weak or failed States increasingly plays a dominant role in security and defense.

This pattern of endemic instability was also emphasized by the Regional Security Cooperation Program (RSCP), which in a study identified it as one of the serious problems the region faces and one that requires special attention, since "the Andean States have experienced [...] processes of deinstitutionalization, rampant government corruption, weak economic growth, political irrationality, centrifugal tendencies, and even the weakening of national viability" (Programa de Cooperación en Seguridad Regional [PCSR] & Friedrich Ebert Foundation, 2007, p. 3).

As is typical in Latin America, transnational crime is heavily involved in the North Andean RSC and, therefore, in the Andean-Amazonian Arc. The CRS serves as a route for production, consumption, and transit that has contributed to the development of strategic points used by criminal gangs, aiding their operations and hindering efforts to reach them through legal means.

This causes instability across various areas of state action, including the political, military, economic, environmental, and social spheres. In this context, it is worth noting the thesis by Meneses Castillo (2016), which discusses the main transnational crimes and their classifications. It also provides representative scenarios, with a focus on South American countries, where common factors

include the presence of gray areas, extensive borders, and weak security and defense systems.

Then, as researchers point out, the threats and vulnerabilities in the Andean-Amazonian Arc form a complex and widespread agenda, marked both by transnational issues related to the endemic practice of illegal activities and by internal problems stemming from deep structural weaknesses in the region's countries. Some of these are prototypes of failed States, where "institutions have ceased to function or have been co-opted to serve private, often illicit, interests" (Naim, 2005, p. 57).

Transnational Crimes in the Northern Andean Security Subcomplex: An Arc of Instability Based on Organized Crime Networks?

Security in the Northern Andean Security Subcomplex is a top priority for the societies and governments of the Amazon Basin countries. It is a key topic of study and concern due to the ongoing development of TOC, which is seen as an illegal activity that causes instability and is connected to offenses committed in more than one country, as well as offenses that happen in one country but are carried out by groups operating across multiple nations (Riquelme et al., 2019, p. 10).

In the region, new transnational actors involved in extensive TOC networks are actively engaged. Lucía Dammert (2012) observes that "in matters related to public security—such as the perception of crime, the occurrence of violent crimes, easy access to weapons, violent protests, and assessments of the police—the region is characterized by a sense of insecurity" (p. 14). Consequently, criminal violence has become one of the most significant challenges confronting governments in the area.

These links with international illicit networks and internal co-optation in border cities, for example, facilitate the formation of multiple symbioses between the contraband economy and organized crime culture, harming human security in Amazonian democracies. Because of this, from a public security perspective, the Northern Andean Security Subcomplex is one of the most violent regions worldwide, representing a major challenge for Latin American democracies.

These concerns become clear when understanding that this geographic region has large areas of porous borders, a situation that encourages organized crime, especially related to drug trafficking, arms smuggling, human trafficking, and illegal immigration. This also explains certain bilateral tensions (Riquelme et al., 2019).

Murillo (2016, as cited in Rodríguez & Nieto, 2020) examines and analyzes how organized crime groups impact the political dynamics of countries in the region, providing evidence that illicit activities have directly influenced the exercise of political power. This phenomenon is reinforced by the lack of governability, which is reflected in the fragility and weakness of various affected States, which “have ceased to address the needs of many social sectors. These criminal groups have exploited this situation to gain legitimacy among these sectors of society” (Rodríguez & Nieto, 2020, p. 265).

One of the biggest transnational crimes in the Northern Andean Security Subcomplex is drug trafficking, which is why this scourge should be considered the main—though not the only—source of income for these organizations. In this regard, it is perhaps the most serious threat to security, the principles of the State, and the relations between affected nations. It is important to note that the activities of these criminal groups have significant consequences, including environmental damage, institutional corruption, and societal decline (Rodríguez & Nieto, 2020).

In this regard, Tokatlian (2014) notes that an important work by Edwin H. Stier and Peter R. Richards from 1987 (*Strategic Decision Making in Organized Crime Control: The Need for a Broadened Perspective*) offers a clear framework for observing and assessing how organized crime develops through three distinct phases: predatory, parasitic, and symbiotic. In the “predatory” phase, territory and control are essential. TOC must influence and dominate one or more illicit goods within a secure physical space; it must identify routes for transporting these goods; have access to markets to sell its products; and ensure personal protection.

In the “parasitic” phase, the political and economic influence of crime grows significantly. This stage not only shows the increased reach of organized crime but also three concerning trends: its legitimization, proliferation, and democratization. The author emphasizes that during this phase, organized crime shows notable corruption in both the public and private sectors. In the “symbiotic” phase, the power of criminal activity becomes more evident, while the political and economic systems become as dependent on organized crime as they are on the established structure. The line between what is lawful and unlawful, what is legitimate and illegitimate, becomes unclear, and the rule of law itself is weakened (Tokatlian, 2014).

This analysis indicates that in the Northern Andean Security Subcomplex, where the TOC is highly developed, these stages must be identified and analyzed separately to guide intervention and the development of policies and practices aimed at reducing organized crime. Neglecting to do so will allow the next phase to progress. This is crucial for understanding issues such as drug trafficking.

The Andean-Amazonian Arc of Instability: A Case Study of the Northern Tri-Border Between Brazil, Colombia, and Peru

The premises presented so far suggest that, regarding the Andean-Amazonian Arc, international drug trafficking flows across the weak borders characteristic of World Order 2.0. This shows that the fragility of the rule of law is a major cause, with the rise in local social violence being one of its effects (Pinto & Rodríguez, 2020; Procópio, 2010; Queiroz, 2022). As will be discussed later, the tri-border or Amazonian Trapeze—the area formed by the cities of Tabatinga (Brazil), Leticia (Colombia), and Santa Rosa de Javari (Peru)—serves as a key distribution route for various illicit drugs used in global trafficking networks.

In addition to what has been mentioned, it is important to note that the Brazilian part of the region is strategically close to drug-producing areas in Colombia and Peru. This makes it vulnerable to the influence of drug cartels, mainly Colombian, which aim to move their production to supply both national and international routes along the Solimões River to Manaus, and from there to other parts of the country and the world (Araújo, 2018).

The northern tri-border area between Colombia, Brazil, and Peru, therefore, presents numerous issues related to fighting crime, where TOC is widespread. In this context, the idea that, in this region, TOC undermines the political and economic foundations of States is relevant, “fueling vicious cycles of insecurity, as members of criminal networks can cooperate with corrupt governments, paramilitary groups, or terrorist organizations” (Gobierno de España, n.d., p. 1, as cited in Rodríguez & Nieto, 2020, p. 266).

This situation results in a population that generally struggles to meet basic needs due to the fragility of the region's institutional structures, which led Rebeca Steiman (2002) to describe the northern tri-border area as the “periphery of the periphery.”

This is an area where TOC, as we have repeatedly stated, emerges, marked by insecurity, unrest, and societal decline, demonstrating the convergence of multiple institutional failures. Therefore, “the permanent presence of illegal armed actors in this border region is largely due to the absence and weak presence of the Colombian State in its peripheries” (Trejos, 2015, p. 1), as well as the States of Brazil and Peru in these three main “twin cities”: municipalities divided by a border—whether a river or territory—that are closely linked through daily economic and cultural activities. For these reasons, this interaction can have practical

consequences for the sovereignty of States over their territories, a situation worsened by the rise of a drug financial market controlled by trafficking networks, which significantly impacts the financial and social life of the Amazonian Trapeze (Pinto & Rodríguez, 2020; Steiman, 2002).

It must be recognized that the large size of the northern tri-border area makes it hard for the government to effectively oversee, control, and manage both the cross-border flows and the movements within the country. This creates opportunities for crime, which manifests as the political and social decline of institutions in the region, covering an area of 1,632 km² (Figure 4).

Figure 4. *The Northern Tri-Border between Colombia, Peru, and Brazil*



Source: Instituto Mayor Campesino (2015).

Besides what has been mentioned, Fernández (2016, as cited in Sampó, 2018) points out that a true network of illegal groups with advanced logistics and operations has emerged, amplifying effects never seen before. This is due to the strong ability of these groups to control and manage in the region, along with the lack of equipment and personnel from States to effectively enforce their sovereignty.

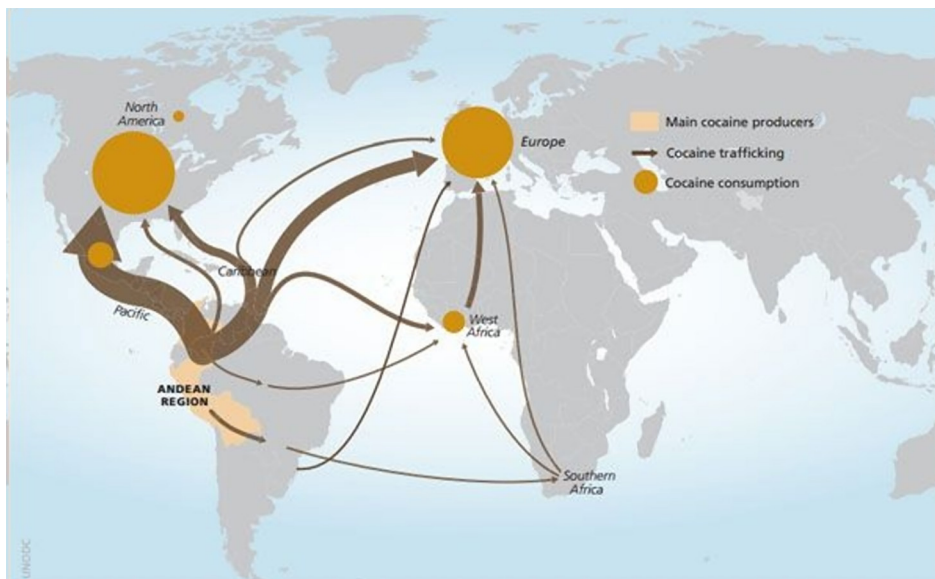
The most significant and largest crime in the tri-border region, as the data indicates, is drug trafficking. It is an area where international illegal networks centered on drug trafficking exist and continue to expand, mainly due to the lack of state presence and, certainly, law enforcement (Trejos, 2015). Therefore, the Amazon is considered crucial for drug trafficking because of its numerous waterways, most of which flow into the Amazon River in Brazil and from there into the rest of the world.

According to data from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) *World Drug Report*, published in 2019, the cocaine market functions as an economic engine for the Amazonian Trapeze, with Colombia and Peru as its main producers. Together, these countries experienced a 78.8% increase from 2010 to 2017 (UNODC, 2019, p. 76). Besides reaffirming that the Solimões River route is one of its key outlets for production, it states that Brazil has become a major consumer market in recent decades, not just a transit route for this cocaine.

As Cuervo (2018) notes, this is because of the lack of alternative instruments and insufficient control in the border area, since the three countries do not have the necessary security cooperation to stop or reduce illicit activities. It is troubling that smuggled goods can cross borders freely via roads, boats, planes, and other transportation methods.

This confirms that the Andean-Amazonian region, located on the northern tri-border, is a dangerous zone of instability experiencing rapid development within the framework of World Order 2.0 (Figure 5). It is also known as a route for illicit goods, particularly cocaine, a key Amazonian product with high added value, which remains one of the most urgent challenges for strengthening governance in security and defense.

Figure 5. Cocaine Flow Routes from the Northern Tri-Border



Source: O Estado Net (2017).

Conclusions

World Order 2.0 is a tangible and recognizable reality, just like all the external factors caused by complex interdependence relationships, which are seen as potential sources of regional instability. While globalization has undeniably brought benefits such as improved information exchange, more connections, and expanded trade opportunities, criminal networks have exploited this situation to reproduce illicit trafficking chains involving arms, people, and drugs, mainly (Pinto & Rodríguez, 2020). As a result, the illegal economy has become a challenge that surpasses the capacity of the States within the South American Security Complex and is viewed as a shared problem that all must confront.

Specifically, this chapter examined the Northern Andean Security Subcomplex overall, and more specifically, the Andean-Amazonian Arc of Instability, which is emerging to strengthen organized crime networks in the northern tri-border area between Brazil, Peru, and Colombia.

Before drawing conclusions, it is crucial to consider the methodological limitations of this study. On one hand, the lack of data, especially quantitative data, has prevented us from establishing definitive correlations related to the hypothesis. On the other hand, the qualitative inferences collected suggest causal relationships between the variables examined: the dynamics of instability in the tri-border (dependent variable), the levels of fragility of the rule of law, and the geopolitics of the criminal networks operating within the Security Subcomplex linked to the illicit economy (independent variables).

So, what do the descriptive (how) and/or causal (why) inferences demonstrate? The exponential rise in illicit activities in this region, driven and fueled by organized crime, has negatively affected the relationship between Colombia, Peru, and Brazil across multiple sectors, from the economy to security and defense, creating vicious cycles of systemic instability.

Thus, it is important to emphasize the following partial conclusion: the extent of transnational crime development in the local context of the northern tri-border region promotes the growth of the illegal economy. Since many people seek their livelihoods in the informal sector, there is direct recognition and even sympathy for those involved in illegal and informal economies. This has implications for global illegal activity networks reaching parts of Asia, Africa, and Europe, considering the strategic geographic position of the Andean-Amazonian Arc.

With transnational illicit activities confirmed as direct causes of disruptive externalities, it is important to strengthen coordinated, polycentric cooperation between neighboring countries to address this threat and disrupt production and consumption chains, thereby countering the sources of instability that challenge, among other actors, the Armed Forces.

Although the rule of law is fragile, partly due to an economy increasingly based on illicit activities—as this case study suggests—collaborative efforts are expected to encourage interactions among multiple government agencies and civil society to establish and enforce rules in this specific area. In other words, we see polycentric governance mechanisms as some of the best ways to achieve collective and effective responses to the harmful disruptions caused by organized crime.

Finally, the analysis supports the direct relational hypothesis that the more transnational the activities of illicit operations, the higher the likelihood that the Northern Andean Security Subcomplex, particularly the Andean-Amazonian area, will structurally develop into an arc of instability due to the weakness of the rule of law and the economy of illicit activities.

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