

The Cadence of War

Predatory Warbands and Confederated Irregular Forces

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War Patterns of Violence, Human Trafficking, Forced Labor, and Cross-Border Coordination

Core Definition

This definition describes a pattern of actors engaged in organized violence, trafficking, and exploitation across borders.

A confederated irregular force refers to a coordinated alliance of independent groups that operate without centralized command, yet align through shared incentives, mutual benefit, overlapping objectives, and strategic relationships. These groups may include criminal organizations, trafficking networks, and other non-state actors.

A predatory warband refers to small, mobile units within this system that carry out localized, opportunistic actions. Their activities often include violence, coercion, evasion, and targeted exploitation rather than sustained conventional engagement.

Operational Pattern (“Cadence of War”)

The “cadence” reflects repeating patterns of activity. These patterns include:

- Cycles of movement, action, and withdrawal
- Use of asymmetrical tactics such as evasion, surprise, and destabilization
- Opportunistic targeting
- Rapid shifts in location and structure to avoid detection

Trafficking as an Operational System

Within this definition, trafficking is understood as a structured, profit-driven system that can involve:

- Recruitment, transport, and control of individuals

- Use of coercion, fraud, or force
- Movement across jurisdictions to reduce risk and increase profit

This activity is often interconnected with other forms of organized crime, reinforcing the broader system.

Coordination, Allies, and Support

Formal alliances are part of the operational strategy, and coordination occurs through:

- Partnerships between groups
- Shared logistics, routes, and resources
- Sustained and temporary cooperation based on mutual benefit
- Strategic alliances that may include political or institutional involvement

Support can exist at multiple levels, local, regional, or transnational, and may involve both formal and informal channels.

Tactics and Methods

Activities associated with these groups reflect irregular and asymmetrical methods, including:

- Avoidance of direct confrontation with state forces or
- Attacking state forces
- Use of mobility and decentralization as advantages
- Blending into civilian environments
- Reliance on speed, unpredictability, and dispersion

These activities adapt elements of military strategy and coordination.

Operatives Similar to Military Force

- Structure is intelligent
- Coordination is strategic
- Activities are primarily criminal and exploitative, while reflecting patterns consistent with organized conflict