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The construction of the “other” in International Relations: a conceptualization of the enemy in the post 9/11 scenario and the amplified security dilemma

Introduction

The characterization of the enemy has suffered several changes along with the evolution of the international security conflicts. The traditional rivalries between states, many of which took place during the twentieth century, coexist today with conflicts between state and non-state actors. War is no longer an exclusive attribute of the nation-state.

The following work aims to give a broader definition of the term enemy, a notion that, within the framework of International Relations, has been applied almost exclusively to armed conflicts between states. The purpose is to integrate the term enemy into certain areas of dispute between state and non-state actors.

In doing so, the intention of this study is to reconsider the security dilemma, by incorporating the non-state actor into the conflictive dynamic between states. After 9/11, the “other”, portrayed by a non-state actor, started playing a fundamental role in the decision-making process of states, specifically regarding foreign policy. This, ultimately, affected interstate relations.

The intrusion of the non-state actor in a world dominated by the rivalry between states represents a new aspect of worldwide reality which needs to be addressed. The incorporation of the non-state actor in the security dilemma, at the same time, urges an upgrade of the conceptualization of the enemy in International Relations.

The non-state actor transcends the classic national frontiers, and also finds its identity outside sovereign state limits. This may cause a newly found friction between states, a feature which became much too evident after the terrorist’s attacks of 9/11.

Why do we see the “other” as a potential enemy? Why does a state attacks or threatens another state when the original attack or threat came from a non-state actor? None of these questions have an obvious answer. The security dilemma needs to see past its
rivalry merely between states and acknowledge the new enemies that took the world by surprise in September 2001.

Non-state actors embody new types of enemies in International Relations that change the realist conception of the security dilemma. An important problem from a historical point of view, given that the world, until 9/11, was used to state against state confrontation in the international arena. Also a problem from a cultural point of view, taking into account that the “other” can be regarded as an enemy of one’s country merely because of its outfit and/or religious views. To determine why does western civilization see the “other” as a potential enemy, and how does particular societies visualize an enemy, state or non-state, is a much complicated task to carry on.

First of all, the present study will explain how the conceptualization of the enemy has evolved throughout history. Emphasis will be placed on the differentiation between state and non-state enemies. At the same time, these types of enemies will be subdivided into the ones known as ‘hereditary’ and the ones called ‘unknown’. Two pieces of work will be taken into account: Marc Ferro’s, who describes the *historic* enemy, and Stanley Hoffmann’s, who refers to new kinds of actors that arise after the Cold War.

Second of all, considering Samuel Huntington’s analysis on “Clash of Civilizations” and Olivier Roy’s on “Globalized Islam”, this paper will examine the perception the West has of an *enemy* which it does not know, but which was able to describe head over feet. That actor in question is the “other” arabic-muslim, stigmatized as an unknown non-state enemy.

Later, this unknown non-state enemy variable will be disaggregated. The existing multicultural aspects of different states will be taken into consideration. This has led to a scenario where the population of certain countries finds enemies inside their own frontiers: an internal unknown non-state enemy.

Lastly, a specific concept of enemy which has gained popularity particularly after the attacks against the Twin Towers in 2001 will be unveiled: terrorism, as an external unknown non-state enemy. The present work will explain the role this actor, which does not recognize national frontiers and finds its identity beyond state sovereignty, has in international conflicts.
In order to discuss the topics mentioned above, first it will be necessary to define key concepts such as state, non-state actor, war and, of course, enemy. Together with these definitions, we will look into the convergence between interstate conflicts and those surrounding state and non-state actors, which have led to the emergence of an amplified security dilemma.

Whenever we write about a state, we refer to the actor with the legitimate power of use of violence within a delimited territory, under a regime of governing and governed. We follow Stephen Walt’s definition on “Revolution and War”, where the state is described as an “administrative and coercive agency, which posses the legitimate authority over a specific territory”\(^1\).

A non-state actor is an individual or group that could find its identity outside the traditional frontiers of a given state, and find refuge in religion and secular ideas which go beyond the ones constituted in the sovereignty of a nation. The non-state actor could suffer a complete uproot from the state where it was born.

The concept of war used hereinafter refers to an armed conflict which does not include exclusively two states, but which can introduce a non-state actor into the conflict. Nonetheless, the participation of the nation-state as part of the dispute will be necessary.

In order to give a proper and broader definition of the term enemy, the following work will resume Martha L. Cottam’s analysis, which summarizes certain vital attributes of an enemy: “moral characteristics and rotten values, intelligence and ability at the mercy of the destruction of a very dangerous adversary. Associated to a threat, the enemy will use any means to fulfill his intention of hurting one’s country”\(^2\).

Cottam defines an enemy as a known image linked to the state (“one’s country”). However, what happens when the enemy is someone the state has never had direct contact with before? What happens when the enemy neither defines itself as being part of a sovereign state, nor respects national frontiers? We shall introduce a point of view which goes beyond the perceptions or intentions of the nation-state. The non-state actor will come into play.

Amplified Security Dilemma

The emergence of non-state actors, which resulted in new types of enemies, urges to look at the security dilemma thought out by the realist school in a new light. Current events like the so-called “War on Terror” and the new international security agenda of different states, which now target to combat primarily non-state threats to their national security, forces the view of a security dilemma that includes the non-state actor in its dynamic.

The ignorance of the intentions of state “A” created a sensation of insecurity in state “B” which, consequently, reinforced its armamentistic program to win security. Nonetheless, the effect was totally contrary, since state “A”, when seeing its counterpart extended its armaments, ended up reinforcing its own, perpetuating a cycle of uncertainty and insecurity between nation-states. Here lies the security dilemma understood by realists.

The non-state actor must be included into this analysis, since it can have a fundamental role in the conflicts between states. The disputes between states coexist with the conflicts between state and non-state actors. This coexistence, at the same time, can have certain causality: for instance, a conflict between a state and a non-state actor can originate a war between states.

No interstate conflict or rivalry between a state and a non-state actor has priority over the other. They are connected, they affect each other, because the result of one dispute can have a direct impact over the other. For example, just like the murder of Archduke Franz Ferdinand committed by serbian nationalist Gavrilo Princip triggered the Great War in 1914, the United States invaded Iraq after a terrorist attack held by Al Qaïda against the Twin Towers.

What is the role of a non-state actor in the amplified security dilemma? The uncertainty regarding the non-state ‘other’ can make a state to deepen its antagonism with other states, with the objective of guarantying its own safety within national frontiers. The initial uncertainty refers to a non-state actor, but leads to a scenario where an armed conflict between nation-states can take place.

The ignorance of the intentions of the non-state ‘other’ may cause the threatened state to take measures in search for greater security. This, at the same time,
could result in a growing insecurity sensation by another state. Therefore, the search of safety and peace, initiated by the uncertainty caused by the actions of a non-state actor, may cause a situation of war between states.

After 9/11, United States could no longer distinguish between state and non-state enemies, and only considered enemies of the West without making any difference. This led George W. Bush attack a state, Iraq in 2003, under false pretenses and after the terrorist blow conducted by a non-state actor, Al Qaida.

Mary Kaldor, when referring to armed conflicts involving non-state enemies, points out that “the barbarism during war between states may end up being a matter of the past”, since these traditional disputes have been left in the background when facing, for example, the struggle against terrorism. Nevertheless, continuing with the argument of and amplified security dilemma, these conflicts between states cannot be put aside, since they can be triggered by the actions of a non-state actor.

State and non-state enemies: from the hereditary to the unknown

Non-state actors have been playing a decisive role in the international security arena for a long time. Although they existed prior 9/11, they started gaining much more relevance after Al Qaida’s terrorist attacks of 2001. Consequently, the different nature and origin of actors worldwide calls for a renewed nomenclature of the enemy in International Relations.

Enemies can be of four types: hereditary state enemies, unknown state enemies, hereditary non-state enemies, and unknown non-state enemies. This classification can help have a better understanding of the security dilemma that includes the non-state actor.

Hereditary state enemies

The great armed conflicts of the twentieth century had states as main characters. The rivalry between different nation-states lingered over decades, with only few years of peace in between.

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At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, nationalism started having a key role on these conflicts within states. Marc Ferro, on “The Great War: 1914-1918” wrote about German and French soldiers marching towards the First World War with national enthusiasm and fanaticism, eagerly to face at the battlefield a historic state enemy: “The singular combats which make the nations rivals corresponded [...] to a tradition deep-rooted to the bottom of people’s conscience. Each of them had the feeling of their existence being threatened by the hereditary enemy”

Germany and France had faced each other on the battlefield during a big part of the nineteenth century: the disputes for Alsace and Lorraine, the rivalry between Bismarck and Louis Bonaparte, the unifications, etc., and then again in the twentieth century, in the First and Second World War.

The enemy had a face, a nationality built inside state frontiers. One could even locate it on the map with no problem. Proximity, in certain cases, played a decisive role when it came to knowing the hereditary state enemy.

**Unknown state enemies**

The lack of proximity and absence of a war record are two characteristics of the unknown state enemies. Nonetheless, these are necessary variables, but not exclusive, since there can exist hereditary state enemies separated by great distances that have never clashed with each other on an armed field.

Firstly, the unknown state enemy can appear as a consequence of the amplified security dilemma: a non-state actor causes a threat to state “A”, which in consequence threatens or attacks state “B”, linked or not to the non-state actor which caused the threat or attack in the first place.

Secondly, state “A” can identify state “B” as an unknown state enemy if state “B” is in an alliance with a great power to which state “A” is confronting. The military intervention of the United States in countries like Vietnam exemplifies this case: a war fought on an unknown land, which background was about the dispute of capitalism and communism between the West and the Soviet Union.

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Thirdly, the defense of a geo-political position can lead to the constitution of an unknown state enemy. A state which defends an ally in a distant area could end up facing an unknown state enemy, which originally only threatened the existence of its ally.

**Hereditary non-state enemies**

Conflicts between states, in the present scenario, have not disappeared of course, but now they share the worldwide reality with conflicts between state and non-state actors.

However, note that the action of non-state agents in armed conflicts did not start with the 9/11 attacks. Examples of this kind of actor can be found even before the First World War. Nationalisms locked inside imperial state structures, which rebelled when looking for their own self-governance, could be considered non-state enemies. The murder of the austro-hungarian Archduke Franz Ferdinand by a member of a nationalist serbian group called “Black Hand” gives an accurate example of this case.

The hereditary non-state enemies generally have an endogenous origin; they act within the state frontiers of the nation-state which they are in conflict with. The state, at the same time, has identified these actors as a threat to its existence.

The guerrillas FARC in Colombia or the Basque pro-independence group ETA in Spain are some examples of non-state actors who have deliberately confronted a national state structure.

Can endogenous groups lead to a failed state scenario? Different states, when fighting against hereditary non-state enemies, have declared that these actors represent a vital threat to the sovereignty of the nation. Such is the case, for instance, of Russia and the Chechnya separatists in the North Caucasus.

**Unknown non-state enemies**

This type of enemy gained greater relevance after two particular facts: the fall of the Soviet Union and the terrorist attack of September 11th, 2001.

The end of the Cold War not only affected the process of European integration, but also the current conception of the enemy. The end of bipolarity came together with new
state actors, emerging nationalist groups and the disappearance of Germany and the USSR as traditional enemies of the West, led by the hegemony of the United States.

The construction of a new international order, conducted by the United States, described by Charles Krauthammer on “The unipolar moment”, took into account what was going on with new actors, many of which were non-state ones, on the international scenario after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

The renovation of the institutional architecture of the Cold War had to adapt, necessarily, to new types of conflicts and threats, which in many cases where non-state ones. As Stanley Hoffmann explains in “Clash of Globalization”, after 1990 took place a rebirth of nationalisms and religion. This helps have a better understanding of new religious fanaticisms and future terrorist associations. The author argues that the foregoing of globalization threatens the sovereignty of the traditional states, by blurring “the frontiers with information and communication instruments”⁵.

After 9/11, the unknown non-state enemy started playing a fundamental role in the foreign policy of the great powers, especially of the United States. The idealistic speech of exportation of democracy in order to fight against new rivals was one of the main arguments used by George W. Bush to justify the attack against Iraq. The amplified security dilemma is here unveiled, for the American President bound a state to the attacks launched by a non-state actor, as it was the case of Al Qaida.

In his famous speech before graduates of the military institution West Point in 2002, Bush characterized this new unknown non-state enemy, which had severely struck the United States in a non-conventional way, and differentiated it from the traditional enemies of the past to which the country had to deal with. “We face an unprecedented threat. In the past enemies needed big armies and a great industrial capacity in order to jeopardize the United States. The attacks which took place on September 11th required only a few thousand dollars in the hands of evil men”, he said.

To this distinction with the enemy of the past, Bush added another key element of differentiation: the end of the doctrine applied during the Cold War to fight the hereditary state enemy, then being the Soviet Union. The US government admitted that

⁶ Speech of the former president of the United States, George W. Bush, before graduates of the military institution West Point, June 1st 2002.
deterrence and containment were strategies which could no longer be applied to fight against the new unknown non-state enemy. “Deterrence, which is the promise of massive retaliation against nationalists, means nothing to terrorist networks which have no nation or citizenship to defend”, Bush assured.

When Bush justifies that the containment strategy can still be applied against state dictators (Iraq), that provide their terrorist allies (Al Qaida) with weapons of mass destruction, he is actually admitting that an unknown non-state enemy can lead a state, which looks to guarantee peace, to an armed conflict with another state.

The unknown non-state enemy is subdivided into two types: the internal and the external ones. This typology will be analyzed in the last two sections if this exposition.

The stigmatization of the “other”

The “other”, with different religion, culture, wardrobe and habits, has been stigmatized by a society where he/she is a minority. This has become much clearer in western civilization. Given the uncertain international security scenario post 9/11, the “other” has transformed into a new enemy, an adversary that did not necessarily responded to a specific state. Stigmatized, this new type of enemy could have a great influence on a state dominated security dilemma.

Terrorist attacks, specially the one which took place September 11th, 2001, made Western society feel uncertain and insecure towards an unknown non-state enemy that could attack them anytime, anywhere.

This was the speech chosen by the American officials after 9/11: to alert the population when facing hypothetical future terrorist attacks; to say something to local authorities if there were any suspicion of terrorist activity within the national frontiers. The unknown and the different “other” alarmed western population, who lived under a constant sense of insecurity.

As a consequence, the unknown “other” became a non-state enemy who inspired uncertainty and fear. The American society, feeling insecure, stigmatized and

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7 Speech of the former president of the United States, George W. Bush, before graduates of the military institution West Point, June 1st 2002.
identified it as a risk to their survival. But, who is this “other”? How do we define the “other”? Samuel Huntington developed a scenario with new cultural conflicts when dividing the world into different civilizations. The abstract construction of the “other”, which comes from a civilization different than one’s own, is an adequate indicator to analyze the vision the West created of the unknown non-state enemy. Religion, fashion, immigration problems, among other attributes, contributed to the stigmatizing characterization of the “other”, which threatened one’s lifestyle.

Following Huntington´s argument, people’s identity is forged from ethnic and religious elements in common. The purpose of this paper is not to discuss this conceptualization of the identity per se, but to illustrate the way Western society identified the unknown non-state enemy on an “other”, which was ethnically and religiously different.

After 9/11, little did the world know about Al Qaida. This led not only the American authorities but also its population to generalize the few details they had at their disposal: this new unknown non-state enemy professes Muslim religion; its members are foreigners coming from the Middle East or Asia Minor, and are dressed with turbans.

The enemy is no longer identified only with a belligerent nation-state. Huntington emphasizes on objective differences (language, history, religion) together with subjective ones of the different civilizations that will lead to an inevitable scenario of conflict between them. This framework of action goes beyond traditional state frontiers. Whilst the nation-state gets weaker as a source of identity, “the rebirth of religion provides a foundation to identity and commitment which goes beyond national frontiers and joins civilizations”\(^8\), the author explains.

The interaction between civilizations decants, according to Huntington’s explanation, into a relationship of “us against them”\(^9\), anchored in ethnic and religious differences. This can be related to George W. Bush speech before United States Congress on September 20\(^{th}\), 2001, when he asked his internal and external allies to pick a side on the


\(^9\) Huntington, Samuel, op. cit., pp. 29.
new international scenario after the attack against the Twin Towers: “You’re either with us or with the terrorists”\textsuperscript{10}, he underlined.

The stigmatization of the unknown “other”, constructed by the West, can be complemented with the work of Olivier Roy about the Muslim world. “The West sees in Islam an ascendant and conquering religion”\textsuperscript{11}, this author points out. If Islam preaches violence, that is part of another discussion. In this case, we only question the perception a society has of an enemy that identifies itself with Islam.

Due to the radical perceptions of society, quickly to judge and generalize, the non-state “other” finds itself incorporated in the state dominated security dilemma. Public opinion, whose loud voice and strength can influence the decision making process of a state, could play a key role when incorporating this non-state actor into the security dilemma by, for instance, urging its national government to take action against other states to eliminate a non-state threat.

\textbf{The unknown ‘other’, within frontiers}

The internal unknown non-state enemy, stigmatized by public opinion, especially after 9/11, resides in a specific nation-state and is considered suspicious of incurring in illegal actions which may jeopardize the existence of that very state.

It results secondary whether the suspicious non-state actor belongs or not to a terrorist organization; what we are interested in examining in this case is the perception a society has of an “other” which it does not know, with whom it lives, but does not share the same culture, language or religion.

United States is one of the countries where the construction of an internal unknown non-state enemy is better exemplified. Globalization, which came together with a growing interdependence between countries, generated a massive immigration to the United States of people with an Arabic origin who preaches Muslim religion. “Islam has definitely crossed to the West”\textsuperscript{12}, Olivier Roy points out.

\textsuperscript{10} Speech of the former president of the United States, George W. Bush, before US Congress, September 20\textsuperscript{th}, 2001.
\textsuperscript{11} Roy, Olivier, “El islam mundializado”, Editorial Bellaterra; París, 2002, p. 31
\textsuperscript{12} Roy, Olivier, op. cit., p. 13
After 9/11, these immigrants became the main suspects of possible terrorist attacks, turning into the new unknown non-state enemies of the West. After 2001, United States threatened every state that would offer shelter or provide armament to terrorist organizations, and even attacked countries like Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq to vanquish non-state threats.

**Terrorism in the post 9/11 scenario**

Terrorist organizations are one more actor among the wide range of existing non-state enemies. Terrorism, which goes beyond state frontiers, embodies the category of external unknown non-state enemy.

This organizations look to deliberately cause terror in the population by attacking civilians and governmental officials, without distinction. They do not answer to a state government nor do they obey traditional armed conflicts rules.

How does a terrorist organization define its identity? To start with, the sense of belonging is not given at all to the state sovereignty of a specific state. Hoffmann argues that the transnationalization of the construction of the identity came along with globalization, turning these groups into “global actors”\(^\text{13}\).

National frontiers lose more and more relevance in the construction of the terrorist. Al Qaida, as an unknown non-state enemy, has in its ranks “international militants”\(^\text{14}\), who have abandoned their families, their state of birth, and do not find a sense of belonging in the state they live in, whichever it may be.

The Western view associates terrorism with the muslim world. Nevertheless, such groups like Al Qaida do not define themselves over this particular religion, but construct their collective being in comparison to the values the West represents.

Al Qaida defines its identity from what it is not, from what it hates, which then becomes, consequently, target of its lethal attacks. In this regard, Olivier Roy assures this terrorist group gives “priority to armed fight, over religious preaches”\(^\text{15}\).

The conceptualization of civilizations stated by Huntington also contributes to understanding Al Qaida as a terrorist entity which has no consideration for the state

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\(^{13}\) Hoffmann, Stanley, op. cit., p. 1.

\(^{14}\) Roy, Olivier, op. cit., p. 27

\(^{15}\) Roy, Olivier, op. cit., p. 189
attachment and reacts against the West for its objective elements, such as religion or values. “They see conflict in terms of fight between two civilizations, Islam and the West”, Roy assures.

Just the same, the radicalization of members of Al Qaida can be the result of a globalization process coinciding with the end of the Cold War. The apogee of new non-state actors after the fall of the Soviet Union, overlapping with a bigger military presence of the United States in Near East could have made extreme the conflicting positions towards the West of terrorist like Osama Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri.

**Conclusion**

State and non-state actors are in constant interconnection, and their relationship end up being decisive for the construction of the enemy in International Relations. The state is still the main character in the worldwide scenario, but now shares prominence with non-state actors.

The explosion of new actors in the International Relations arena could be considered to be a product of the very same scenario dominated by states. Hatred against a state government, resistance to state oppression, a failed state scenario, uprising nationalism, or even a war between two or more nation-states: there are many ways in which states can originate a process of formation of non-state actors. These non-state actors, later on, could end up being portrayed as enemies by the same state where they were born.

The end of the Cold War, in parallel with an independence process growing deeper between nations, set the explosion of new actors in the new globalized world. In this framework, it became clear that traditional wars between nation-states had to make room, or at least coexist, to new armed conflicts between state and non-state actors.

Psychological or cognitive factors, as well, can help understand the conception a society has about an “other”, seeing as a potential enemy. Generalizations, lack of information, fear and a constant sense of insecurity and uncertainty have much to do with the way we depict an enemy.

Taking this new outlook of worldwide threats into account, enemies of a state are no longer just other state actors. The non-state enemy, therefore, is already considered
when it comes to talking about wars around violation of sovereignty and attacks to the territorial integrity of a state.

The amplified security dilemma, all in all, goes around this matter: the participation of non-state enemies on the development of an armed scenario between states, even when the original objective of these states was to increase security, guarantee peace and reduce uncertainty.

The terrorist attacks of 9/11 confirmed that the security dilemma in International Relations lies in a constant process of renovation, which necessarily has to incorporate new players into the game. Today, the main focus of the state’s foreign policy is directed to state and non-state actors in the same way.

New state policies in international security, along with the change in the discourse by world leaders, together with the role occupied by fear and uncertainty in the public opinion, help construct the different forms of the term enemy.

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