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Reviewed by Gus Frias, PhD

COVID-19, Gangs, and Conflict is an excellent collection of essays, written by 18 subject matter experts, and edited by Drs. John Sullivan and Robert Bunker. This collection addresses the deadly Coronavirus-19 threat, which as of March 2021 has killed over two million humans worldwide, including over five hundred thousand North Americans. In its Prologue, Foreword and Introduction, the authors offer insights on how criminal gangs are exploiting the CoV19 pandemic for self-gain and profit, and to help expand their power and influence. In addition, they identify governmental shortcomings in responding to the pandemic and ways to overcome them. The body of this book is divided into the three parts referenced below.

Part One, titled Strategic Notes, is composed of six chapters, which reflect Third Generation Gang and Cartel Strategic Notes written mainly by Drs. Sullivan and Bunker. In summary, these strategic notes share information on how Rio de Janeiro's gangs impose curfews in response to the Coronavirus-19 pandemic, how the 18th Street and MS-13 gangs enforce domestic quarantines in El Salvador, how gangs in Cape Town enforce pandemic lockdowns, how the revolutionary armed forces of Colombia (FARC) are profiting out of the misery of the pandemic's victims, and how the Italian Mafias and Mexican Drug Cartels are providing humanitarian assistance to their respective citizens to secure their support and further their criminal enterprises. The authors also emphasize that these organized crime groups (OCGs), and criminal armed groups (CAGs) often see themselves as social bandits who appear to rob from the State and the rich to help poor people address their social, economic and health needs, while they simultaneously use their evil power and influence to victimize them.

Part Two, titled Essays, is composed of seven additional chapters that reinforce the commentaries of the previous ones. Specifically, they

address the exploitation of the Covid-19 pandemic by gangs, cartels, militias and mafias, and their adverse impact on nation-states. They also forward recommendations to mitigate them. A brief summary of some of these chapters is provided below.

Chapter seven explores the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on national security, and recommends developing a National Pandemic Plan, centralizing planning, and decentralizing its execution as the right formula for federal-state-local response. To maximize effectiveness, it also recommends establishing a Blue-Ribbon Commission to assess performance and outcomes.

Chapters eight and eleven focus on the impact of the Coronavirus-19 pandemic on the slums and fragile states respectively. These chapters specifically examine the impact of the virus on poor people who have no access to health and financial assistance. They also address the shortcomings of fragile states that are often corrupt and ineffective in meeting these human needs. To beat the virus, their authors recommend helping fragile countries with humanitarian assistance, debt relief, and financial support. They also recommend holding these countries accountable for reducing poverty, crime, violence, and providing effective virus prevention and treatment services to the indigent populations most in need of them.

Chapter twelve focuses on the development of cyber states and their threats to America's national security. These threats include the use of artificial intelligence, machine learning and automation by nation-states to exploit the pandemic for self-serving purposes. According to its author, unlike China that has a national cyber firewall surrounding its borders, the United States has an open worldwide network that requires a stronger cyber posture. As part of this posture, the author recommends approving a new federal law on General Data Protection Regulation that provides funding and authorities to the United States Department of Defense to develop a comprehensive National Cyber Defense Strategy, which ultimately can be used to defeat the threats posed by rival cyber states and ensure the United States of America's national security.

Finally, Chapter 13 explores the use of hybrid warfare defeat mechanisms to fight the Coronavirus-19 pandemic and to counter future

bioweapons. Thinking out of the box, the author of this chapter imagines nation-states threat actors developing biological weapons to harm Americans, and provides a military-oriented, problem solving framework (Czege's Framework) to counter them. In particular, its author proposes using this framework to defeat the coronavirus-19 pandemic.

Part Three is titled Potentials. It includes a Conclusion on how gangs battle nation-states over the contested CoV19 space, and ways to ensure success. Specifically, it clarifies how coercion, social goods, repositioning, and narratives are used by both forces to influence and control territories and populations. To defeat gangs, its authors encourage nation-states to exercise the democratic values of transparency, inclusion, equity, and accountability in serving and protecting their citizens. This section also includes an Afterword that addresses the potential for terrorists to develop bio-weapons similar to the Coronavirus-19 to attack the United States of America, and ways to ensure our national bio-security.

I found all the Chapter commentaries useful in identifying and addressing the deadly challenges posed by the Coronavirus-19 pandemic, and its exploitation by transnational gangs, cartels, militias, and mafias. In particular, I appreciate their views on developing a comprehensive National Pandemic Plan, and corresponding implementation and oversight measures to counter them. Similarly, I agree with their analysis of the cyber threats posed by evolving cyber-states, and the coordination of counter-measures to ensure America's security and dominance in cyber space. In light of the sophisticated 2020 SolarWinds cyber-attack against America's institutions, which is attributed to Russia, I find this latter analysis to be timely, thoughtful and appropriate.

As possible solutions, I support the designation of the Coronavirus-19 as a hybrid warfare threat, and I concur with the use of hybrid warfare defeat mechanisms to fight against it and to counter future bioweapons. According to author Justin Bauman, "A defeat mechanism is defined as the singular action or pattern of activities by which a defender defeats his opponent." Bauman uses Czege's Framework - which is composed of Attrition, Dislocation, and Disintegration - to apply hybrid warfare strategies to defeat the Coronavirus-19 pandemic. Under Attrition, quarantine operations can be used in isolating long-term carriers, which in turn can help weaken the spread of the virus. As part of

this strategy, Bauman also encourages the private and public sectors to allow their employees to work remotely from digital home stations, which can further reduce the spread of this virus. Under Dislocation, proactive operations can be used to shutdown schools, businesses, churches, and public gatherings, which can change social conditions so the virus is not allowed to spread. Further restrictions of borders and transportation networks can also assist to dislocate the virus from its aggressive interaction with humans. Under Disintegration, vaccine operations can provide a permanent solution to bioweapon threats. This strategy requires investing in anti-viral medication research testing against the pandemic's viral infections. This investment and continuous work are vital to address the Coronavirus-19's evolving variants which can be deadlier and more contagious than their previous versions. Consequently, I believe the above Framework's strategies can help guide the work of government authorities and assist them to defeat current and future manifestations of the Coronavirus.

As we face the future, this book offers excellent leadership insights that can be used to protect our fellow Americans from the deadly Coronavirus-19 and the predatory gangs, cartels, militias, and mafias that exploit it. Most important, it offers realistic solutions that can help defeat the virus and reduce the threats of crime and violence in America and the world. Accordingly, I encourage our fellow Americans - and our fellow humans - to read it and use its contents to help ensure our health, safety, and survival.