Intelligence-Led Policing in Honduras: Applying Sleipnir and Social Psychology to Understand Gang Proliferation

Jerry H. Ratcliffe · Evan T. Sorg · James W. Rose

Abstract This paper reports on the application of structured thinking techniques to the development of intelligence-led anti-gang strategies in the Honduran National Police. A variant of the Sleipnir assessment, an organized crime groups' capability measurement matrix developed by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, was employed using a Q Sort methodology. The assessment was administered to 37 Honduran police command staff in January 2012. The assessment required police officers to rank 12 gang attributes based on each factor's relative contribution to gang proliferation. Theories of group behavior were then consulted, and the police commanders reflected on why the attributes were so influential in ensuring gang proliferation using these concepts as a theoretical framework. This paper discusses data that were collected during the assessment. The applicability of Sleipnir, social psychology and the prospects for implementing ILP within the Honduran context are discussed.

Keywords Intelligence-led policing · Social psychology · Gangs · Sleipnir · Honduras

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Introduction

Violence in the nation of Honduras is an epidemic. Fueled by the proliferation of organized gangs, it has earned the unfortunate title of "murder capital of the world" (Robles 2012). In 2011 the homicide rate was 86 per 100,000 persons (Rose 2012). As a point of comparison, the most recent available data (for 2010) indicate rates in the US and UK of 4.7 and 1.2 respectively. Officials estimate that there are approximately 36,000 active gang members in Honduras, 98 percent of who are between 12 to 25 years of age (Nagle 2008). Across the nation communities are subject to extortion and intimidation at the hands of these gangs, who use torture, violence and murder to maintain control. Despite attempts at reform, the Honduran National Police (HNP) remains fragmented, antiquated and disorganized. Police corruption in the country has been described as "endemic" (Berkman 2005, pp. 9), resulting in an unwillingness to trust and invest in policing as a means to tackle the widespread gang problem.

The United States Department of State (USDOS) has committed to assist the Honduran government curb gang activities and the concomitant levels of violence. One component of this assistance is help developing a refocused and police-led, strategic approach to gang violence. As part of a regional gang initiative across much of Central America, the USDOS has provided assistance to the nation of Honduras and the HNP. In addition to vehicles, equipment, computers and analytic software, the USDOS has organized training programs to develop an intelligence-led policing (ILP) framework within the organization to tackle the threat of gangs. One component of a more strategic focus is greater clarity on what fuels gang success and the factors that limit the ability of police to intervene, develop informants and disrupt gang activities. Greater knowledge of the key determinants of organized crime group success is fundamental to more effective strategies that are evidence-based and grounded in intelligence research.

This paper reports on the results of an assessment of Honduran gang capabilities using a Q-sort methodology with 12 factors originally created for the Sleipnir assessment tool, an organized crime groups' capability measurement matrix developed by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). The assessment was administered to 37 Honduran police commanders during a four-day training program designed to introduce the concepts of ILP. The assessment required police commanders from specialized anti-gang units to rank 12 organized crime attributes based on each factor's relative contribution to gang proliferation. Social psychology and theories of group behavior were then consulted, and the police commanders reflected on the relationship between gang psychology and success characteristics, and why the attributes were so influential in ensuring gang proliferation using these concepts as a theoretical framework. This paper discusses qualitative data that were collected during the training program. The applicability of the approach undertaken (effectively an adaptation of Sleipnir), social psychology and the prospects for implementing ILP within the Honduran context are discussed.

The findings are valuable in a number of ways. First, they are a research-based articulation of the characteristics from which Honduran gangs are estimated to derive their success. Second, the findings suggest that strategic thinking tools, such as Sleipnir, can help police officers articulate specific threats to gang interdiction efforts, an important component of risk management in an intelligence-led policing environment. Third, it demonstrates that it is possible to translate intelligence-led policing concepts from developed countries to the Latin American context. Finally, qualitative results suggest that social psychology theories regarding gangs, which are largely developed in the US, are broadly applicable to the Honduran context and are beneficial in helping Honduran police better define their gang problem and the related threats to public safety.

Background and Statement of the Problem

Honduras is the second largest country in Central America. It totals approximately 43, 277 square miles and shares borders with Guatemala, Nicaragua and El Salvador. Its economy is underdeveloped and it remains one of the poorest nations in the western hemisphere, with 59 percent of the nation living below the poverty line (Leonard 2011). The population of just over 8 million people is overwhelmingly young, with a median age of 21 years. Many areas of the country lack basic infrastructure such as paved roads, electricity and running water. Violence is commonplace. Homicide numbers in Honduras have steadily risen in recent years, with 4,020 reported in 2008, 5,253 reported in 2009, 6,236 reported in 2010 and 6,753 reported in 2011 (Rose 2012).

A substantial portion of the homicides committed in Honduras is carried out by organized gangs. In its current state, the HNP faces significant challenges in dismantling these gangs and addressing the rising rates of homicide. With a police force of less than 12,000 officers, many of whom are known to be corrupt, they are greatly outnumbered by the better organized and well-funded gangs, whose members are estimated to be as many 36,000. In addition to having an inadequate and inefficient police force, the penal system in Honduras is largely dysfunctional. The prison system is operating well over capacity, housing approximately 12,000 inmates in facilities designed for only 8,000. Hundreds of gang members have been murdered behind prison gates, and incarcerated gang leaders continue to run their organizations from inside the penal system, effectively in *de facto* control of the facilities (Rose 2008).

Although a number of criminal factions, or *clicas*, with varying degrees of organization operate within Honduras, *Mara Salvatrucha*, or *MS-13* and the 18th street gang, or *M-18*, have been identified as the greatest threat to public safety (Ribando 2007; Rose 2012)[1]. Extortion is a major driver for violence and fear in the country, and is employed as a means to fund gang activity, maintain gang strongholds and ensure the proliferation of illegal enterprises, including the drug and illegal weapons trade. In communities where these factions have strongholds, citizens, businesses and government workers are forced to pay what is referred to as a "war tax" or "rent" to the gangs. Real threats of violence and death are levied upon these communities to ensure payment.

The ability of the gangs to extort and carry out violent acts unabated cements the view among Honduran citizens that the police are powerless. In addition to being viewed by many as corrupt, the HNP's inability to address gang violence and to hold gang members accountable has in many areas driven a wedge between the police and the community. As a result, citizens are frequently unwilling to report crime or assist investigations, and those that do often face retaliation.

Prior to 2008, many governments in Central America, including Honduras, responded to a rise in gang-related violence with "iron-fist" or *Mano Dura* strategies (Hume 2007). Tactics included arresting gang members *en masse* for virtually any infraction, even relatively minor violations such as flashing gang signs or having gang-related tattoos (Boraz and Bruneau 2006). Mass arrests were coupled with severe penalties. In Honduras, a maximum prison sentence of 30 years

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[1] This paper reflects on an assessment designed to encourage police commanders to think strategically about the nature of gangs in general, not just MS-13 or M-18. Therefore, a thorough review of these particular gangs is outside of the scope of this paper. For information focusing specifically on the threat posed by MS-13 and M-18, readers may consult Franco, C. (2007). The MS 13 and 18th Street Gangs: Emerging Transnational Gang Threats?, Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress.

could be levied for simply having ties to known gang members (ibid.). At least anecdotally, these heavy handed, enforcement-based responses are thought to have elicited short-term crime reductions in some cases (Rose 2008), but to backfire in others (Hume 2007). Regardless, these policies were unsustainable in light of the severely overcrowded correctional system.

As the *Mano Dura* era started to disintegrate it was clear to Honduran officials, and their American allies, that a significant reorganization and restructuring of the HNP was required if the country was to move forward. Given the transnational nature of these gang activities, and the threat to American security that they pose (Seper 2004; Nagle 2008; Rose 2012), the United States government has a vested interest in assisting the nation in dismantling these gangs and curbing the related violence. As a result, the USDOS developed a regional gang initiative for Central America in 2008[2]. A heavy emphasis on ILP is part of this initiative, and the following section describes the translation of the ILP concept to the Central American context.

Intelligence-Led Policing in Honduras

Since 2008, the regional gang initiative has sought to develop the analytic capacities of the HNP and to put in place an ILP framework[3]. While there is disagreement about a definitive definition of ILP (Carter and Carter 2009, Ratcliffe 2008), one commonly adopted definition in the literature defines ILP as "a business model and managerial philosophy where data analysis and crime intelligence are pivotal to an objective decision-making framework that facilitates crime and problem reduction, disruption and prevention through both strategic management and effective enforcement strategies that target prolific and serious offenders" (Ratcliffe 2008, pp.6). Carter and Carter (2009) argue that the development of intelligence-led policing requires both an information collection structure to manage threats within a jurisdiction, as well as a supportive organizational infrastructure. Therefore ILP involves a great deal more than the analysis of crime and collecting intelligence. The three-i model of ILP (2008) highlights the nexus between interpretation of the criminal threat environment (Carter and Carter's information collection framework) and the organizational structural need to influence decision-makers to implement policies designed to impact the criminal threat (Figure 1). Under a genuine ILP model, the threat-
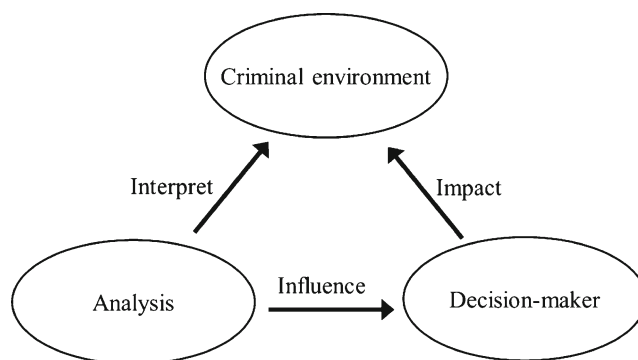
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[2] The USDOS gang initiative is currently being implemented in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. This paper only addresses the work being done in Honduras.
[3] Although tactics to address a variety of contributors to gang proliferation are included in the USDOS gang initiative, such as prison reform and prevention programs directed at youth at risk of being recruited by gangs, only facets related to ILP are discussed here given this paper's focus.

Fig. 1 The three-i model of intelligence-led policing. Source: Ratcliffe (2008)

focused intelligence (Carter 2012) gleaned through interpretation of the criminal environment must be used to influence commander decision-making and guide them in adopting appropriate responses. The analyst's role is thus two-fold. In addition to crime and intelligence analysis, an analyst must also consider the best way to influence the thinking of decision-makers so that appropriate responses are levied (Ratcliffe 2011).

Qualifications regarding the effectiveness of ILP deserve mention. Although ILP is part of a broader movement away from a reactive model of policing, little evidence suggests that it is the most efficient and cost-effective model for police leaders to follow (Sharp 2005), especially when contrasted with other policing models (Innes 2004). Indeed, evaluation of the effectiveness of ILP is particularly challenging, regardless of how one defines success (Ratcliffe 2008). Several concerns over the model have been pointed out, including the reality of the feasibility and quality of crime analysis that is so important to the ILP model (Cope 2004) and police leaders' use of crime analysis and related organizational structure in informing tactics (Innes, Fielding and Cope 2005). These critiques, and others, remain as relevant in Honduras as in more industrialized countries, especially with regard to a potentially 'flawed' and 'premature' focus on risk management (Manning 2001, p. 101) or with the democratic governance of such a function (Greene in press).

Furthermore significant impediments to adopting this model arise specifically in the Honduran context. The USDOS site assessment and plan of action outlined by Rose (2008) identified potential obstacles relating to each node of the three-i model. For example, the HNP is divided into five divisions and until recently there was an absence of a central authority that could provide oversight and accountability, or promote uniformity of behavior and best practice. Although the Honduran congress passed legislation to create a police chief position in June of 2008, the position has seen rapid turnover amid various scandals. The fragmented nature of the HNP and the rapid turnover of leadership is a clear impediment to an analyst tasked with influencing decision-makers.

In addition, Rose (2008, pp.14) noted that whether or not the Honduran government was willing to sustain an anti-gang crime and violence initiative was an "open question." This concern stems from the Honduran government's preoccupation with drug trafficking rather than the gangs themselves. Although ILP is a top down management approach, organizational priorities which are defined without intelligence threat analysis but instead are influenced by political priorities are clear barriers to implementing a viable model of ILP. Although drug trafficking is a widespread problem in the nation and across Central America, USDOS officials are concerned that such a narrow focus will prohibit an expansive analysis of the larger threat from which drug trafficking stems: the proliferation of organized gangs.

A third barrier is related to changing business practice in the HNP. Although the government of Honduras has developed a central intelligence center which shows considerable potential in providing analytic support to investigators, having officers collect and analyze intelligence is fairly new. Resources within intelligence units are also scarce and outdated, and thus commanders have not typically been tasked with using intelligence products or to think strategically about addressing gang violence with any tactics that fall outside of standard police enforcement responses.

Given the untapped potential for the development of some form of intelligence-led policing in Honduras, and the range of obstacles notwithstanding, the USDOS and the third author contacted the first author to develop a training program to introduce HNP commanders to strategic thinking about the threat from gangs and the principles of ILP.

Training HNP Commanders

A four-day training program was administered in January of 2012 in Tegucigalpa, the capital of Honduras. A component of the training emphasized identification of characteristics that enhance the capability of organized crime groups to operate in Honduras. From this threat assessment, identified components that created resilience were then interpreted through a social psychology lens and translated into the development of appropriate responses to undermine gang operational capacity. Training was also devoted to fostering 'buy-in' from the commanders on the adoption of more strategic actions, and appreciating the limitations of enforcement policies such as *Mano Dura*, which are widely recognized as unsustainable given the dilapidated state of the Honduran criminal justice and penal system.

All of the above concepts are new to the HNP and represent a considerable paradigm shift on the part of police commanders and mid-level supervisors. Even with a growing literature documenting what does and does not 'work' in policing, police practitioners in developed countries remain skeptical of innovative or evidence-based policing strategies

(Lum 2009). As a result, even after much analysis in this area, and a continual reinforcement from researchers that standard police practices are ineffective in reducing crime (Weisburd and Eck 2004), police organizations - at least in the United States - have not been quick to abandon the status quo (Lum 2009). Indeed, there is often a gulf between what academics and police see as 'real' police work (Wood, Sorg, Ratcliffe, Groff and Taylor, 2013).

At least at the onset of the training program, and similar to the authors' experience with police in the United States, skepticism over the feasibility of innovative policing strategies within the Honduran criminal justice system was voiced. Concerns over scarce police manpower, corruption, inadequate prisons and lenient court systems arose. Likewise, some commanders were resistant to abandoning strategies that they saw as potentially effective (cracking down and making more arrests), if only they had greater manpower. Steering the training program toward the prospects of ILP and achieving buy-in required the authors to turn the rhetoric of ILP into a realistic possibility for the HNP commanders, and to have them see ILP as more than a lofty academic vision. A level of strategic threat assessment also required the police commanders to understand exactly *why* the gangs had become such a problem. To this end, the program was designed to take academic concepts and theoretical traditions and deliver them in a way that commanders could see as directly applicable to the current situation on the ground in Honduras. As a threat measurement technique, an adaptation of the Sleipnir organized crime groups' capability matrix (explained in the next section) was seen as a means by which the authors could develop in the Honduran commanders more critical thinking about their local threat and why organized crime groups continued to proliferate by tapping into their particularized knowledge of Honduran gangs.

Methodology and Results

Sleipnir is an organized crime groups' capability matrix developed by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (Strang 2005). It is a quantitative technique which is designed to measure the threat posed by an organized crime group (Tusikov and Fahlman 2008). It is a two-stage process. In the first stage, 16 focus groups comprising criminal intelligence experts from across Canada undertook an evaluative exercise designed to rank numerous characteristics in order to determine which specific characteristics were believed to contribute to the success of organized crime groups in the country. In the first iteration there were 16 characteristics, and in Sleipnir version 2.0 the list was shortened to 12. This evaluative exercise resulted in a ranking of the 12 characteristics on a scale of 0-100, with the highest scoring value being 100 and the lowest 20. The attributes included in the assessment are

therefore the consensus of experts in organized crime, as determined through a national survey (RCMP 2010).

In addition to assessing the overall threat level, the matrix uses this rank-ordering system of criminal group attributes to assess the capabilities, limitations and vulnerabilities of each crime group (Strang 2005). In this second stage, analysts can assess the strengths of each organized crime group (usually on a low, medium, high rating system) and then weigh these ratings against the ranking of each characteristic. These rankings are tallied and each crime group is given a Sleipnir score. Crime groups can then be ranked in terms of their total threat level. The technique is a method to assist in developing recommendations and supporting intelligence analysis in a succinct and straightforward manner (RCMP 2010). Although it is by no means an exhaustive intelligence assessment, it can be thought of as a "skeleton" of a full strategic intelligence assessment (Strang 2005, p. 2). For the purposes of this research, we are interested in the generation of the first stage rankings only.

As described in the RCMP documentation, *Corruption* is defined as the corruption of public officials through the practices of illicit influence, exploitation of weakness and blackmail[4]. It also reflects the ability to place organized criminals or their associates into sensitive positions. *Violence* is defined as the use of violence and intimidation through explicit or implicit threats of violence against targets outside the group to further any organizational objective. *Infiltration* is the effort to gain a foothold with legitimate private organizations and businesses to further criminal activities. This control or influence may be used for money laundering, establishing a pretense of propriety, facilitating, protecting and concealing criminal enterprises and/or for intelligence gathering. *Money laundering* involves the process of legitimizing cash or other assets obtained through illegal activities. Effective money laundering conceals the criminal origins and ownership of the funds, creates a legitimate explanation for the proceeds of crime and creates wealth over time. *Collaboration* represents the extent of collaborative links the crime group has with other organized crime groups. *Insulation* is defined as the efforts to protect the main figures in the group from prosecution through the use of subordinates, fronts, corruption and/or other means. *Monopoly* is the control over one or more specific criminal activities within a geographic area of operation, with no tolerance for competition. This does not prevent partnerships of profitable convenience between or among organizations. Violence, intimidation and/or informing on competitors are common methods used to establish or maintain a monopoly.

Scope represents the geographic sphere of operations and influence of the organized crime group. *Intelligence use* is defined as the intelligence/counter-intelligence and counter-

surveillance capabilities of organized criminals. This use of intelligence is used to defend the group against law enforcement and rival gangs, and to identify new targets. *Diversification* represents the extent to which the illicit activities of the group are diversified. *Discipline* is the practice of coercing obedience to hold the organization together. This includes the use of violence, intimidation and other sanctions or forms of coercion on group members and associates. Finally, *cohesion* is defined as strong bonds that are fostered at both the individual to individual and individual to organization levels in order to create criminal solidarity and common protection. The bonds can be created through such factors as common backgrounds, blood relations, financial relationships, length of association and geographic origins. They can be instituted through rites of initiation and required criminal acts of loyalty.

One limitation of wholesale adoption of the Sleipnir first-stage approach as a strategic threat assessment tool is the transferability of criminal characteristics determined by Canadian experts from the Canadian context to a Latin American environment, which is different both culturally as well as socio-economically. A second is the time-consuming nature of the first stage of the process. The 16 focus groups not only engaged in discussion but also an analysis based on exhaustive pairwise comparison. This requires respondents to rate one characteristic against every other in multiple one-to-one responses. For 12 characteristics this would require a questionnaire of $n(n-1)/2$ questions, i.e. 66 individual responses. After extensive coding, the analysis also requires specialized software to generate the results.

For the Honduran exercise, police commanders were provided with the 12 characteristics and asked to rank these using a simplified variation of the Q-sort methodology. The Q-sort, or Q method, has been used in such diverse fields as workforce analysis (McKnight 2008), political science (Brown 1980), recreational planning (Ward 2009), perspectives on flood management (Raadgever 2008) as well as perceptions of criminal gang characteristics (Ratcliffe, Strang and Taylor 2014). As Shinebourne (2009, pp. 93) writes, "Q method is considered particularly suitable for researching the range and diversity of subjective experiences, perspectives, and beliefs". Given the absence of a strategic criminal intelligence capacity in Honduras, a technique that explores perceptions rather than robust evidence is more appropriate and still within the mandate of a broad information collection strategy. A traditional Q-sort consists of a set of statements that participants rank order onto a pre-defined quasi-normal forced distribution such that every Q sort results in a mean of zero (Brown 1980; Ward 2009). This has the value of ensuring variability in the scoring as well as preventing response bias (Dawis 1987), a useful trait of attitudinal research (Cross 2005). It is also preferable to asking users to rank items on a Likert scale, where inter-rating reliability is not assured and where an extreme ranking can be

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[4] These attributes and definitions are taken from the RCMP (2010) Sleipnir version 2.0 documentation.

applied to each characteristic. In our case the statements were the 12 characteristics defined above, and the distribution was organized such that we required officers to arrange the attributes by six levels of importance, where they ranked one attribute as the most important, which was given a value of +3, and one attribute as the least important, which was given a value of -3. They could include two characteristics at the second level of importance (+2), three at the third level of importance (+1). The overall distribution (with number of responses permitted in parenthesis) was as follows: +3(1), +2(2), +1(3), -1(3), -2(2), -3(1).

The assessment was designed this way for two reasons. First, Sleipnir was being used here to explore the capacity for a consensus opinion among the commanders as to what attributes allowed the gang problem in Honduras to continue. If a subset of key attributes could be identified, these could be a foundation on which to foster discussion about why these attributes were so important to the capacity of gangs and integrate learning with reference to theories of group behavior. Secondly, requiring the commanders to rank the attributes from most important to least important precluded the possibility that commanders would rank all of the attributes as of high importance. The Q sort therefore forced them to make item comparisons and hone in on the most influential characteristics and to focus specifically on those attributes.

Brown (1980) argues that as few as 40 participants can indicate the perspective of a whole population; however in our case we are limiting ourselves to candidates pre-selected by the HNP as being among the most experienced anti-gang officers in the country. Although our total of 37 is slightly under Brown's suggested limit, Watts and Stenner (2005) have argued that effective Q studies have been completed with fewer than 40. Furthermore these officers represent a greater percentage of the target population: HNP officers with anti-gang operational experience. The results that follow are highly correlated with similar work we have done with smaller groups of HNP officers. This corroborative evidence has given us confidence that

the results that follow are a robust indication of the beliefs and perspectives of HNP officers on what characteristics contribute to the proliferation of gangs in Honduras.

Sleipnir is one of many potential techniques that can be applied during the first stage of ILP (as expressed through the idealized 3-i model): crime intelligence analysis. Here, the analyst interprets the criminal environment, but as has been noted elsewhere (Ratcliffe 2008, pp. 110), the specifics of this analysis will depend on how exactly the analyst is tasked as well as the operational environment under which the analyst works. So although Sleipnir is being taught and applied here, we should note that this is not an assessment of intelligence-led policing *per se*. Rather, the goal of integrating Sleipnir into the ILP training was to (1) provide an example starting point for commanders to contemplate an assessment of the risks within their organized crime/street gang environment, and (2) to later engage in discussion on the importance of this knowledge and how it might shape future analyses. As discussed below, we found that integrating Sleipnir into discussion of phase one of ILP was successful in achieving these limited goals.

Results from the Sleipnir assessment are shown in Table 1, ordered by mean response. Violence, discipline and cohesion were ranked as the three top attributes which contributed to the success of Honduran gangs. The attributes contributing the least to the success of the gangs were diversification, money laundering, and insulation.

Social Psychology Perspective on the Sleipnir Results

After tallying the results a discussion followed which sought to address why these attributes were so important. In order to stimulate a more analytic discussion the commanders were introduced to social psychology and theories of group behavior, with the theories structured within the context of the Sleipnir Q sort results. This was designed to provide a more structured mechanism to conceptualizing the gang threat

Table 1 Sleipnir responses from Honduran National Police representatives

Characteristic	N	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Violence	37	-2	3	59	1.59	1.572
Discipline	37	-3	3	55	1.49	1.325
Cohesion	37	-3	3	44	1.19	1.808
Corruption	37	-3	3	14	0.38	1.754
Intelligence	37	-3	3	9	0.24	1.48
Collaboration	37	-3	2	-2	-0.05	1.779
Infiltration	37	-3	3	-6	-0.16	1.724
Monopoly	37	-3	3	-20	-0.54	1.643
Scope	37	-3	2	-31	-0.84	1.659
Diversification	37	-3	2	-32	-0.86	1.273
Money Laundering	37	-3	2	-41	-1.11	1.308
Insulation	37	-3	1	-49	-1.32	1.396

rather than just asking why the gangs were so violent, cohesive and disciplined. Responses to this initial question tended to be recursive responses. For example, one commander commented that "the gangs are violent because they have to be in order to successfully extort," while another agreed, commenting that the gangs "are so successful at extorting because they are so violent." The more structured approach was conducted *en masse* as an instructor-led large focus group with contemporaneous note-taking.

Social psychology is a subfield of psychology. It is the marriage of psychological concepts—"processes that occur inside the individual, including perception, cognition, motivation, and emotion, and the antecedents and consequences of these processes,"—and sociology— the study of, "social collectivities, including families, organizations, communities, and social institutions" (DeLamater 2006: xi). Social psychology is concerned with, (1) the impacts of individuals on one another, (2) the impacts of groups on its individual membership, (3) the impacts of individuals on the groups to which they belong and, (4) the impact of individual groups on one another (ibid.). Social psychology is therefore useful for understanding gangs and the threats that they pose individually because, "an understanding of groups is essential to almost every analysis of social behavior" (Levine and Moreland 1998, pp. 415).

Violence

It is not surprising that the commanders ranked violence the most significant attribute contributing to the success of Honduran gangs. Given the number of homicides in the country, many of which the commanders attribute to gang members, the gangs are undoubtedly violent. However, the commanders struggled with formulating a solid answer to the question of *why* this was so. Indeed, social psychology offers significant insight into how gang membership might foster violence. In particular, key principles of group behavior appear relevant, including *group attitudes and polarization, group decision-making* and the *diffusion of individual responsibility* (Pynchon and Borum 1999).

The following section discusses the concepts that the commanders were introduced to during this particular component of the training program. After discussing these concepts, we review qualitative data recorded during the training to highlight the applicability of social psychology to the problem of gang violence in Honduras. We then close with discussion of how the Sleipnir assessment, combined with knowledge of theories of group psychology, may be a welcome addition to an intelligence-led approach toward addressing threat of gangs, both in Honduras and elsewhere.

Group Attitudes and Polarization

Research suggests that the opinions and attitudes of individuals become more extreme in a group context (Moscovici 1985;

Levine and Moreland 1998) which is referred to as "group polarization" within social psychology (Isenberg 1986; Pynchon and Borum 1999). Gang membership might foster more extreme attitudes amongst its membership through two mechanisms. The first involves simply being exposed to more extreme attitudes through gang membership. Although an individual might join a gang with less extreme attitudes, simply being introduced to more extreme viewpoints might cause them to reassess their own position. Second, individuals within gangs might compete amongst themselves to be accepted by the group and to stand out. In voicing more extreme positions or taking more extreme (i.e. violent) actions, the individual might be viewed by his peers more favorably. Through these processes, the gang itself might become progressively more violent.

Group Decision-Making

As an entity, gangs might also follow a decision-making process referred to as "group think" (Janis 1982; Esser 1998; Pynchon and Borum 1999). This involves the perceived need to reach an accord when making decisions involving gang actions. Gang decision-making could be flawed and, thus, more extreme, because group members feel less vulnerable than they actually are, there is an increased pressure to agree with other members in the group, and members will rationalize their decisions and believe perhaps flawed characterizations of those outside of or working against the gang (Janis 1982; Pynchon and Borum 1999). Therefore, there is less of a likelihood that competing views will be voiced, and decision-making made in haste and without proposed alternative courses of actions could result in more extreme outcomes.

Diffusion of Individual Responsibility

McCauley and Segal (1987) suggest that those acting on behalf of a gang may feel less personal accountability for violent actions they undertake. Likewise, Pynchon and Borum (1999) point out that these individuals might see the actual responsibility of an act of violence that they commit as being spread across the group. With a diminished perception of individual responsibility, individuals acting for the group will likely exhibit behaviors that are more extreme and violent than they would engage in if they were not part of the gang (Pychon and Borum 1999).

Gang Cohesiveness and Discipline

The commanders ranked gang cohesiveness and disciple as the second and third most influential gang characteristics contributing to their proliferation. Many commanders commented that the gangs were incredibly tight knit and extremely disciplined. The concept of "in-group out-group bias" (Stephan 1985) and understanding the benefits of being part of a gang offers insight into how group membership can

foster this reported cohesiveness and discipline (Pynchon and Borum 1999).

In-group Out-Group Bias

Research suggests that groups have a perceived need to see themselves in a positive light (Brewer and Kramer 1985). In-group bias reflects the prejudice of group members' thoughts about the group and the actions that the group takes; that is, they see the behavior of the group in a positive light, and associate these positive perceptions to attributes that are internal to the group (Pyncho and Borum 1999). In contrast, outside individuals or other groups are seen by group members in a negative light (Fiske and Taylor 1991). These biases can cause in-group members to "dehumanize" and "demonize" other groups or outside individuals (Pynchon and Borum 1999, pp. 345). Therefore, even the most heinous actions carried out in the name of the group may be seen by group members as appropriate due to the negative perceptions they have of individuals outside of their own group, regardless of whether these characterizations are accurate.

Understanding the Rewards of Group Membership

Gleaning insight into the benefits of group membership can contribute a great deal to our understanding of group actions, motivations and how compliance and obedience are fostered. Individuals join groups for a variety of reasons, yet, presumably, there is something to be gained by group membership (Brewer 1991). In the context of Honduran gangs, many commanders commented that membership ensured safety and financial security in a country where neither are guaranteed. This safety and security may relate to aspects of the group itself, as well as the threat posed by outside individuals and groups. Pynchon and Borum (1999, pp. 347) suggested that forces which initially may draw members to a group may also act to foster a sense of solidarity amongst group members. For example, these "positive forces", such as the liking of other group members, the sense of trust that is built, and the feeling of purpose that the group provides the individual, may act to keep individuals attached to other members and, thus, the group. Likewise, Pynchon and Borum (1999) suggested that "negative forces", namely the threat posed by those outside of the group, may also act to foster this cohesiveness. For example, if a group perceives that it is threatened by those external to the group, the actions that an individual takes to protect themselves and/or the group from outsiders may also contribute to a feeling of solidarity. Thus, the benefits of group membership can also work to ensure sustained group solidarity and cohesiveness.

As group cohesion increases, it also appears that the extent of compliance and obedience does as well (Moscovici 1985). Compliance refers to "a particular kind of response—acquiescence—to a particular kind of communication—a request…but in all cases, the target recognizes he or she is being urged to respond in a desired way" (Cialdini and Trost 1998, pp. 168). Compliance to directives is more likely to occur with individuals belonging to especially cohesive groups. Membership becomes less likely to defy group requests, especially if the costs of failing to comply are made clear, and a disciplined constituency results. The discipline that the commanders considered pertinent to gang proliferation might also be a function of group cohesiveness.

Revisiting the Sleipnir Results

The following excerpts are contemporaneous notes taken during the discussion that followed after being introduced to these concepts. We found that the discussion that followed was much more productive in that it provided the commanders a basis for interpreting the Sleipnir results and contemplating responses to gang violence that moved beyond simple enforcement. Commanders reported that the theories were especially applicable to the gang situation in Honduras. For example, one commander commented that they were "exact"[5].

Violence

In terms of violence, the commanders conveyed a number of accounts where the behavior of individuals that they had previous contacts with drastically changed after joining a gang. For example, one commander commented that one "average kid" in the neighborhood he patrolled became a gang "shooter [hitman]" in a local *clica*. After the young man was arrested for a homicide, the commander was shocked to learn that he was implicated in multiple execution-style killings. The commander subsequently commented that, "The gang without a doubt turned this average kid into a killer…I have no doubt that [group polarization] was the reason." Likewise, a commander in a precinct that she described as, "not so bad [violent]" believed that the homicides that they do record have become progressively more heinous. Although she could not directly attribute the desire for gang members to stand out amongst their peers to the increasingly atrocious killings, she speculated that this was the case: "This [theory] can explain exactly why I am seeing this. I see no other explanation".

There was also a great deal of discussion about the ability of individuals to "hide behind the gang" after participating in killings or other violent acts. The commanders agreed that a diffusion of individual responsibility was a contributor to increasing levels of violence. For example, one commander suggested that "It is no wonder that people do not fear arrest and that they commit these crimes…we know that one

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[5] Since the training was being translated to the commanders from English to Spanish, and their responses translated from Spanish to English, this and the subsequent translations may not be precise.

[particular] gang is responsible for the killing, but cannot prove who the killer is." Since the commander could not arrest the whole gang, he relayed that, "much of the time this is why the case goes unsolved…people kill because they know that their gang will not point out who did the crime." The diffusion of individual responsibility was particularly frustrating for the commanders. In fact, many saw it as *their* fault that killings have increased to the extent that they have: "We do our best, but this is the result of our failure, we have to identify the individual killers so they know that they will be arrested."

Finally, the commanders believed that the gangs were extremely "brainwashed", even to the point that they had "no sense of reality". One commander suggested that, "these gangs are so brainwashed that they only believe what they are told by other members". Although no commanders were able to offer specific information about gang decision-making, they speculated that it is unlikely that there is a "democracy" or that "regular [members of low rank]" gang members are able to offer alternate courses of action: "They just do what they are told to…I think it is unlikely that they use their brains much." One commander believed that he has seen the changes in the extent of gang violence over his career. He attributed these changes to changes in leadership, and suggested that if gang leadership is less inclined to use violence, the gang is less violent. Once the gang violence picks up, "it is clear that there is a new person in charge…I have seen this happen many times". For this particular commander, it all came down to changing the decision-making of the gangs: "If only less violent or more [civil] leadership made the decisions there would be less killing. Regular members [members of low rank] will do whatever they are told and won't suggest other plans [courses of action]."

Gang Cohesiveness and Discipline

Although the commanders ranked gang cohesiveness and discipline as the second and third most influential gang attributes, it was clear from the discussion that they believed that these attributes were what precluded the HNP from dismantling them: "It is very hard to get a gang member to talk. Most will not even under intense pressure". They described some gang sects as "families" that did almost everything together. One commander commented that, "They live in neighborhoods where most are gang members so they only associate with each other". They believed that this made it impossible for people to leave the gangs, even if they wanted to. One commander noted that, "The thing is it is not that they are just cohesive because they want to be. They have to be. You cannot just leave a gang. Where would they go? They know that trying to leave would cause them death [the gang would kill them]".

Although the commanders generally believed that for many gang members the prospects for getting out of the gang,

even if they wanted to, were nil, they did recognize that there were numerous benefits to gang membership. For many, gang membership provided safety, financial security and a sense of belonging. Even if a member disagreed with the violence or the actions of the gang, the commanders considered it unlikely that a member reaping the benefits of gang membership would defect or speak out against gang actions: "These people eat, have extra money and are safe. Why would they leave the gang? So many people here do not have these things here". They also agreed with the theorizing that cohesiveness also fosters discipline. "The truth is these men follow orders because of the benefits attached with being part of the gang". Gang members also know that defying orders could bring severe consequences. The fact that gang members could become victims themselves if they failed to act on behalf of the gang was something that many commanders saw as pertinent: "The discipline that we see with gangs is due to what would happen if they were not…they would be killed". Another commander believed that, "the best gangs are very organized and efficient…the people who kill on behalf of the gang must be, because they know if they are not they will be held guilty [responsible]".

Integrating Sleipnir and Social Psychology into ILP

By the commanders' estimation, social psychology was quite applicable to gang violence in Honduras. In general, there was recognition among the group that applying Sleipnir had allowed them to isolate the most influential gang characteristics, and subsequently flesh out why these attributes were so important. In contrast to earlier discussions which tended to elicit recursive responses, the discussion that followed information regarding theories of group behavior was more productive. The combined use of Sleipnir characteristics, examined through the mechanism of the Q Sort, enabled the commanders to articulate their collective experience through the use of structured thinking techniques that converted abstract experiences and perspectives into a collective ordering of gang capabilities. These capabilities were then examined through the lens of social psychology, with the effect being not only greater clarity of the dimensions of the problem, but also a sense of where to address the specific facets of gang behavior that made them strong. As a result, they were able to clearly articulate the threat from gangs, the capacities that enabled gangs to thrive, and it provided a foundation for a threat assessment of the entire gang environment.

Achieving a sense of where to start addressing gang cohesion and strength is vital for problem-oriented and intelligence-led policing strategies. Given what was learned during this program, it is possible to reflect on how Sleipnir and social psychological concepts can assist in moving towards a model such as ILP. In order for ILP to be successful

there must be a move away from the *status quo* practices and mindsets; however, police have been slow to abandon traditional law enforcement strategies centered on the broad use of enforcement and arrest, and to replace them with more innovative strategies. Indeed, this was observed at the onset of the training program. Having not been previously tasked with thinking strategically about addressing gang violence, it was unsurprising that there was a degree of skepticism. Even when commanders expressed a total lack of confidence in the ability of the criminal justice system to resolve any problems within the country, there was recalcitrance to consider their job beyond an arrest-and-prosecute mindset.

As a tool to get police commanders critically thinking, this experience in Honduras demonstrated that Sleipnir, when coupled with social psychology as discussed above, was quite useful. In addition to stimulating a more nuanced discussion and contributing to a deeper understanding of why the gangs are so resilient, these tools also assisted in pointing out the weaknesses of policies such as *Mano Dura.* As said, many commanders became cognizant of the fact that policies which relied primarily on increases in unfocused arrests were unlikely to elicit real and lasting reductions in crime.

The commanders reflected on how social psychology, and ILP more generally, could assist them in responding to gangs. With a better understanding of what allows gangs to proliferate, the responses they discussed as potentially effective were much more innovative than the traditional law enforcement responses that many were hesitant to dismiss at the beginning of the training. There also became a realization for many that simply arresting gang members *en masse* would do little to disrupt the gang activity. As one area commander said, "With what you told us, we can see that gangs will be here to stay if all we do is arrest and detain them". Many of the responses they discussed reflected the knowledge they had gleaned during the training, especially the contributions of social psychology.

The responses that were discussed generally involved methods to reduce gang violence, not to completely dismantle the gangs. The commanders were realistic that this would be a daunting task that would require significant resources and likely many years. They did believe that they could devote resources to at least reducing the extent of gang violence. For example, one commander believed that the key to reducing violence was to identify which specific gang members were responsible for carrying out the violence. It was felt that by focusing resources to prioritize targeting these individuals, those moving into gang shooter positions would be less likely to see their individual responsibility diffused across the gangs. This focused approach on only the most violent offenders was quite different than the broad arrests tactics that the officers lauded at the beginning of the training.

Social psychology was also useful here in that it assisted in pointing out intelligence gaps that are pertinent to understanding the relative threat posed by individual gangs. Although commanders had considerable insight, their insight was haphazard and unfocused and there was information relevant to implementing effective prevention responses that they had not considered important, and thus did not pursue. For example, although many of the commanders could discuss the types of violent acts that the gangs undertook, they could not articulate exactly how these decisions were made. Likewise, some had no knowledge of specific gang leaders' identities, nor could they recount how the leadership was structured. After pointing out these gaps to the commanders, they had a much clearer understanding of the holes that needed to be filled in order to fully understand the gangs and the threat that they pose: "this is information we need to know." Since decision-makers are responsible for defining organizational priorities, understanding intelligence needs are central to moving toward ILP. A greater appreciation for gang social psychology assisted HNP commanders to think strategically around the knowledge required to implement effective responses.

Conclusion

The USDOS 2008 regional gang initiative sought, among other things, to embed within the HNP an ILP framework. Within this framework, it is not enough to be able to articulate that there is a threat. A key component of ILP is the need for knowledge to influence decision-making and thus drive action focused on a threat. Structured thinking, aligned with an appropriate business model, is the foundation of ILP. It has enabled many police services to "take a more genuinely strategic approach to the management of their business, an approach grounded in a more precise knowledge and understanding of the problems they faced" (Flood and Gaspar 2009, pp. 51). The value of ILP to the HNP in this context is not because it tells the HNP what to do, but rather gives them a mechanism to better understand the threat as a precursor to initiating a response. And perhaps this is key to the translation of policing concepts from first-world countries to developing countries in Latin America.

Cross-cultural criminologists have long cautioned against assuming a direct translatability of criminological ideas across national boundaries. As Karstedt writes; "New strategies of crime prevention, procedures of dealing with offenses, offenders and victims, or models of institutions and therapeutic intervention for juvenile and adult offenders rapidly spread around the globe. More than a decade ago this seemed to be a one-way and dead-end road from western industrialized countries mainly to those in the Third World" (Karstedt 2001, pp. 300). While the tide is slowly turning, and there is a realization that local cultures, availability of local resources, and the organization of national criminal justice systems are important

in the success of attempts to curb crime, there are still instances where attempts at the wholesale transportation of criminal justice initiatives have not replicated the successes of the original site. The case of Compstat springs to mind.

The advantage of ILP is that it provides a business model rather than a prescriptive set of solutions. Too often, police officers in Latin America learn of crime prevention or investigative solutions that are far beyond their resource or cultural capacity. With continued training and support, a localized version of ILP could be translated to the needs of the HNP, and this framework could potentially move the HNP away from *status quo* operating procedures that have been deemed ineffective. Given the breadth of support lent by the USDOS, including prison reform, prevention programs and intelligence training, the prospects of violence reduction in the country appear more promising than they did a few years ago.

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