Convergence of Crime, Terror, and Corruption: 
Policy Recommendations


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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This brief presents five policy recommendations for countering convergence of crime, terror, and corruption, as they were discussed during the Combating Terrorism Workshop held at the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany, Sep. 23-24, 2013. (Content is prepared by and based on a presentation to the group by Dr. Elena Kovalova, Professor of National Security Studies, National Defense University, Washington D.C., USA, and a member of the PfPC Combating Terrorism Working Group).

The convergence of transnational crime, terror, and corruption is a growing threat to global security. Terrorist and transnational organized crime (TOC) groups have developed tight operational links and adopted each other’s tactics. In the regions of protracted conflicts, their interactions are multidimensional and permanent. The difference between them is often indistinct. The convergence between terrorist and TOC groups has reached the point where it is possible to talk about the formation of terrorist-criminal hybrid networks. Corruption glues them together and reduces operational risks.

Recommendations presented deal with synchronization/consolidation of terror/crime response, foreign aid oversight, exposing the criminal activities of terror groups, police involvement in peacekeeping, and strategy development/analysis. Specific emphasis is placed on raising the priority given to the integration of law enforcement into combating hybrid networks. Countering hybrid networks is especially problematic because of their evolving and amorphous nature, diversity of activities and rapid technological upgrade. Counter terrorist and counter crime strategies are usually developed separately. These now require amalgamated strategies.

CONTEXT

Conventional approaches to the crime-terrorism nexus center on links between them from three perspectives: (1) as conspiratorial relationships within the global pax mafiosa; (2) as temporary business networks; and/or (3) as a process of acquiring in-house criminal capabilities by the terrorist groups. Corruption was traditionally viewed as a facilitator for criminal and terrorists groups to achieve their goals faster and safer. Motivations of ideology rather than financial gain often drew a red line between terrorists and criminals.

Changing Paradigm: The convergence of crime, terror, and corruption poses a growing threat to global security.
The mounting support for terrorist and criminal groups against corrupted governments in the Middle East, Maghreb, South Asia, Latin America, Sub-Saharan region and Western Africa twists the meaning of good governance and democracy; and often legitimizes terrorist ideology, extremism, and criminal means in the eyes of deceived, terrified people.

A shared gang-like culture, facilitated by: (1) “hacked” technologies and innovations, (2) exchange of criminal “expertise” between terrorist and criminal groups and (3) a combination of legal and illegal mafia-type financing cements the crime-corruption nexus. Speed and ease of modern communications reinforces the global impact of local terrorist and criminal operations.

**New Modus Operandi:** Links of terrorists to drug trafficking activity are expanding. For example, the attempted car bombing of Times Square of 2010 was organized and sponsored by terrorist group Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). The group is responsible for exporting heroin to a number of global destinations, despite an Islam-based taboo.

Trafficking in cocaine from Columbia to Spain and Portugal through Ghana, Togo, Burkina Faso, Niger, Mali, Algeria, and Morocco had become a joint venture of Columbian FARC and the Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) by 2010. Since that time, a constellation of mixed terrorist and criminal groups affiliated with the AQIM has been established in the Sahel, including the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), Ansar Dine (Defenders of the Faithful), and the Khaled Abu al-Abbas Brigade.

“Flooding Europe with drugs” and kidnapping for ransom are not the only illicit income generating activities of the AQIM and affiliates. Terrorist-cum-criminals groups in the Sahel also smuggle weapons looted in Libya and extort fees for passage through Northern Mali.

**Corruption:** Corruption often fuels development of sophisticated black markets in hotspots around the globe. In such areas, terrorists often engage in drug trafficking, smuggling, extortion, racketeering, kidnapping, money laundering, often combining legal and illegal activity similar to the classic mafia model. The Haggani network, operating in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and Hezbollah, doing business globally, are classic examples of such overlap between legal and illegal activity.

Prominent today is a catastrophic scattering of criminal networks across borders, shaping new smuggling routes across Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkey, and United Arab Emirates. Such networks are often facilitated by corruption.

**Soft Power and Social Networks:** Hybrid terrorist groups skilfully use both soft power and social networks to muster local support. One of many examples is the Al Qaida affiliated organization, Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS), uploading a YouTube video featuring ISIS operatives handing out Teletubby dolls to children in Aleppo.

**Trends in Terror/Crime Nexus:** For the most part, modern-terror hybrid organizations demonstrate five distinctive features with prospective implications for policy makers:

1. **Criminalization of Al Qaeda (AQ):** Success in curbing terrorist financing has raised importance of “criminal fundraising” for terrorist organizations. Notable examples are AQ offshoots in Iraq, Syria, Northern Africa, and Sahel region. Such TOC groups are thriving in these regions.

2. **Use of kidnapping as a tactic:** Kidnapping by Islamist groups has increased since 2002. Distinctive among characteristics underscoring such activity is targeting foreigners as a priority. Also, ransom has often become more important than political demands. Moreover, such activity is now often supported by use of sophisticated communications and transport equipment as well as advanced weaponry.

3. **Increased dependency on drug profits:** Financing of terrorist activities through proceeds from drug trafficking has become commonplace. Worrisome is trans-continental cooperation in drug trafficking by such groups as FARC and AQIM. Another trend is the continuing growth of narco-states and drug havens for associated terrorist groups in Western Africa. It is noteworthy that the military coup in Guinea-Bissau in 2012 stemmed in part from a struggle over share of cocaine profits.

4. **Growing role of corruption as a terror/crime enabler:** It is well established that corruption is an enabler for TOC hybrid networks. Trying to distinguish themselves from corrupted authoritarian regimes, TOC’s demonstrate care about population, winning legitimacy, societal support and safe havens in exchange. In this regard, redistribution of food and provision of basic services for population is a trump card for extremist groups. It may also be the case that corrupted governmental structures, the security sector in particular, leak law enforcement information to terrorists and criminals and otherwise protect them from apprehension.
and prosecution -- often facilitating development of black markets, with potential to overshadow any legal entities.

5. Exploitation of social networks: Commonplace is use of social of networking sites by crime/terror hybrid groups, resulting in the formation of “digital mobs”. An example is the "BlackBerry riots" in England where criminals used mobile devices and social media to organize lootings in the country. Such social networking methods have become a prototype of self-organization and power projection used by today’s crime-terror hybrids. Unlike the process of radicalization through forums and chat rooms, which needs time and can be traced and interdicted, mobilization through Twitter or similar networks is relatively spontaneous, and therefore incredibly difficult to counter.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Mutual financial, logistical, and operational support is the most disturbing trend in terror-crime group dynamics since it (1) shrinks likelihood of destroying their financial and operational base; (2) diminishes chances of bringing them to justice; and (3) multiplies their capabilities.

Unless strategies are adjusted, including better integration of law enforcement professionals into the matrix of solutions, countering hybrid networks will fail. Counter terrorist and counter crime strategies are traditionally developed separately. These should be developed together due to the amalgamated nature of the problems they address.

Five recommendations, not necessarily reflecting the full consensus of the PfPC CTWG working group, are offered for consideration in the context of discussions on the crime/terror/corruption convergence.

1. Consolidate response efforts. Amalgamate and synchronize existing law enforcement, counter terrorism, and intelligence obtaining strategies for strategic regions and TOC/terrorist hubs. Incorporate financial, arms, and other TOC-related corruption investigations into joint strategies.

2. Impose foreign assistance conditionality. When providing international aid to transition regimes, ensure that a recipient regime implements anti-corruption measures. Critical here is to have oversight mechanisms mandated and mutually accepted.

3. Expose criminal activities of terror groups. Publicize, in multiple forums, the criminal activities of terror groups and the contribution of crime groups to the carnage of terrorism. Publicity is a potent component of terrorist strategy; but publicizing the common criminal component of terrorist activity is clearly not. Highlighting such linkages offers advantage in the realm of winning public support and curbing anti-terrorist mobilization.

4. Enhance police involvement in peacekeeping operations. Promote inter-agency cooperation in this domain at international level through international organizations -- such as the United Nations, Europol, and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. Endeavors which combine international peacekeeping with strong law enforcement support in ungoverned territories are especially effective.

5. Develop/analyze strategies and tactics of counter terror/crime initiatives within a common framework. Use an interdisciplinary network framework to counter interdisciplinary terror/crime networks. Produce common insights into the major trends, operational methods, strengths and limitations of counter-terrorism and counter-TOC operations. Examine best practices and scrutinize failures. Multinational networks such as the PfPC Combating Terrorism Working Group have much to offer in organizing such analytical exchanges and in dissemination of findings through participating institutions.

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