

Summary of Conclusions: Combating Terrorism Working Group (CTWG)

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The preceding articles in this issue of *Connections* have explored the following question: Is there a “nexus” between terrorism and arms, drug, and human trafficking? Specifically, the articles examined potential links between terrorism and trafficking in Central Asia, the Caucasus, South Eastern Europe, and Western Europe. The authors researched both the routes of terrorist and criminal activity and the financial relationships between terrorist and criminal groups.

Before engaging in research, the members of the Combating Terrorism Working Group (CTWG) developed the following hypotheses:

- Terrorists are using the same routes as arms, drug, and human traffickers.
- Terrorists are using arms, drug, and human trafficking to finance their activities.
- If a “nexus” exists between terrorism and trafficking, there may be an opportunity to counter terrorism by penetrating trafficking groups.

The CTWG was interested in the extent of collusion between terrorist and criminal groups, particularly terror-crime interaction that is indicative of a close relationship. Moving along the terror-crime interaction spectrum over time, terrorist and criminal groups have the potential to move from *activity appropriation* to a so-called *nexus* to a *symbiotic relationship* to, ultimately, a *hybrid*.¹ The position that terrorist and criminal groups occupy along the continuum indicates the degree of collusion between terror and crime.

The results of the research focused on local, regional, and international terrorist and criminal groups. However, terrorist and criminal networks that operate transnationally were of particular interest. Transnational terror and crime networks can potentially have an impact *across* regions, from Central Asia to Western Europe. The presence of transnational networks, which constitute the “new terrorism” and the “new crime,” has implications for transnational counterterrorism and counter-trafficking strategy.

Ultimately, indicators of collusion between terrorist and criminal groups were found across all regions. However, the extent of the collusion or the depth of the interaction along the terror-crime spectrum varied by region and type of crime. The following section is a summary of the findings from this research, which draws parallels across regions. Subsequent sections will discuss the conclusions in relation to the original hypotheses and briefly touch upon the policy implications of the study.

¹ Louise I. Shelley, et al., *Methods and Motives: Exploring Links between Transnational Organized Crime & International Terrorism* (Rockville, MD: National Criminal Justice Reference Service [NCJRS], 2005), 35.

Terrorism and Drug Trafficking

By far the greatest amount of collusion was found between terrorists and drug traffickers. In South Eastern Europe and Western Europe, evidence suggested that terrorist groups and drug traffickers have a strong relationship. For example, direct links were discovered between drug traffickers and Al Qaeda backed groups, the ETA (Basque Homeland and Freedom), Hezbollah, and the PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party). Moreover, in South Eastern Europe, terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda, Hezbollah, and the PKK were found to be connected with Turkish, Albanian, Kurdish, and other criminal groups.

In contrast, the research uncovered fewer evident links between transnational terrorists and drug traffickers in the South Caucasus, although some do exist. There was, however, evidence of ties between non-state armed groups in the separatist enclaves in the region and drug traffickers. Finally, Central Asia remains both a source and transit region for drugs. While drug trafficking remains a huge industry, its links with terrorism remain unclear. In sum, because of the great amount of collusion between terrorists and drug traffickers, the relationship between them is best described as a *symbiotic relationship*.

Terrorism and Arms Trafficking

After drug trafficking, the second greatest amount of terrorist-criminal collusion was found between terrorists and arms traffickers. In South Eastern Europe and Western Europe, solid links were discovered between terrorist groups and arms traffickers. In Western Europe, links between arms traffickers and terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda, ETA, the GIA (Armed Islamic Group), the IRA (Irish Republican Army), the PKK, and Salafist extremist groups were uncovered. By contrast, terrorists in South Eastern Europe appeared to have secondary relationships with arms traffickers through Russian-Moldovan criminal groups, who are in turn connected to the weapons trafficking industry.

In the South Caucasus and in Central Asia, however, fewer links were found to exist between terrorists and arms traffickers. In the separatist regions, relationships between non-state armed groups and arms traffickers have been inferred. In Central Asia, arms are typically smuggled through the region and destined for both terrorist and criminal groups elsewhere. Despite a lack of direct links, the role of the South Caucasus and Central Asia in arms trafficking cannot be readily dismissed: both regions remain the primary sources of illegal arms, which are largely trafficked to the West for potential use by terrorist groups. Thus, in general, the links between terrorism and arms trafficking can be best described as a *nexus* across all regions.

Terrorism and Human Trafficking

In contrast to the stronger links that were uncovered between terrorist groups and arms and drug traffickers, the links between terrorism and human trafficking were found to generally be fewer and weaker. One exception to this finding was in South Eastern

Europe, where links between terrorist groups and human smugglers were evident. In South Eastern Europe, particularly in the Balkans, terrorist groups make use of human smugglers primarily as a way to enter the region. Terrorist groups also, to a lesser extent, financially benefit from a relationship with human traffickers in South Eastern Europe.

In regions other than South Eastern Europe, the level of interaction between terrorist and human trafficking activity was found to be much lower. More specifically, in Western Europe, human traffickers tend to indirectly provide a supportive environment for terrorists. In the South Caucasus, the links between terrorism and human trafficking appeared to be ambiguous at best. In Central Asia, the victims of human trafficking often become associated with terrorist groups. In short, where terrorist and human trafficking groups are present, the relationship between them—if any—can be described as an *activity appropriation*.

Conclusions

In conducting these studies, the CTWG took steps to reevaluate its original hypotheses. Based on the results of the research with respect to terrorism and trafficking routes, the first conclusion is: *Terrorists are using the same routes as arms, drugs, and human traffickers*. Both terrorists and criminals throughout Central Asia, the South Caucasus, South Eastern Europe, and Western Europe are benefiting from porous borders that result from a general lack of law enforcement and security. Notably, in contrast to the original hypothesis, both terrorist and trafficking routes are flowing from East to West. Initially, the CTWG believed that terrorist routes would flow toward the East, while arms, drug, and human trafficking routes would flow to the West.

The first conclusion has repercussions for the possibility of financial collusion between terrorist and traffickers. Accordingly, with respect to terror-crime financial collusion, the second conclusion is: *Terrorists are using arms and drug trafficking to finance their activities*. While links between terrorism and arms and drug trafficking have been established through research, the relationship between terrorism and human trafficking remains less clear. Financially, however, both terrorists and human traffickers benefit from the unregulated “shadow” economy and endemic corruption that exists across all regions, which is manifested in the illegal arms and drug trades.

Ultimately, the extent and type of collusion between terrorists and traffickers has implications for the countering of both phenomena. Thus, regarding counterterrorism, the third conclusion is: *The evidence shows that penetration of drug traffickers is a possible way of countering terrorism*. Because of the lack of concrete links between terrorism and arms trafficking, there is only a *marginal value* in penetrating arms trafficking groups in order to counter terrorism. Similarly, because of the general lack of interaction between terrorism and human trafficking syndicates, there is *little to no value* in penetrating groups trafficking in humans. By contrast, the strong links that have been found between terrorist groups and drug traffickers present a greater opportunity for counterterrorism efforts through penetration of drug trafficking groups.

Policy Implications

This research has shown that terror-crime interaction is not just a local or a regional problem; terrorists and criminals operate *transnationally* in Central Asia, through the Caucasus and South Eastern Europe, and on to Western Europe. As a result, effectively countering transnational terror and crime requires increased regional and international cooperation across all regions.

Finally, as the research here demonstrated, combating terrorism requires more than just going after terrorists. Border security and protection is of utmost importance in fighting both trafficking crimes and terrorist activity. The increase of law enforcement and security in “gray areas,” or separatist regions beyond the reach of central state power, is particularly crucial. It is important to reduce the availability of local safe havens where terrorists and criminals interact in order to counter both phenomena internationally.

Bibliography

Shelley, Louise I.. *Methods and Motives: Exploring Links between Transnational Organized Crime and International Terrorism*. Rockville, MD: National Criminal Justice Reference Service [NCJRS], 2005.