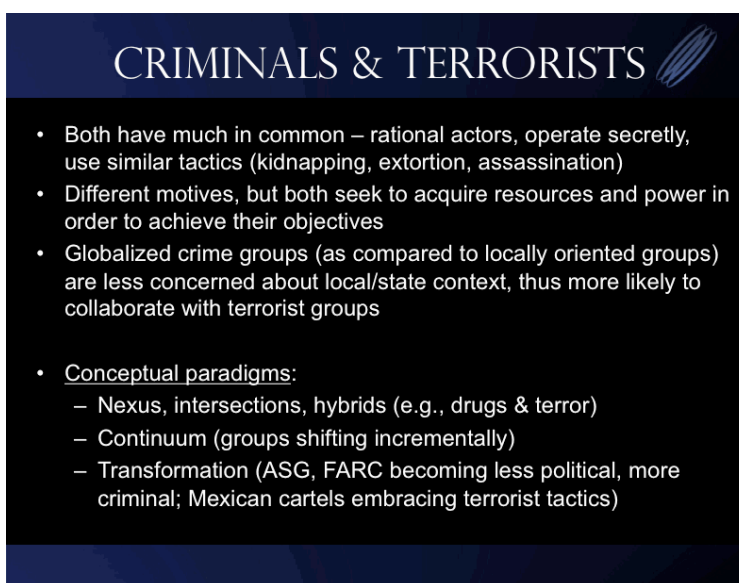


**CRIME-TERROR INTERACTIONS AND THREAT CONVERGENCE**  
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Thank you, David. Good morning everyone, it is an honor to be here among so many colleagues with experiences and research to share, and I look forward to learning from you all.

My presentation this morning will attempt to give a brief overview of what the academic community has written about the intersections of crime and terror in recent years.<sup>1</sup>



**CRIMINALS & TERRORISTS**

- Both have much in common – rational actors, operate secretly, use similar tactics (kidnapping, extortion, assassination)
- Different motives, but both seek to acquire resources and power in order to achieve their objectives
- Globalized crime groups (as compared to locally oriented groups) are less concerned about local/state context, thus more likely to collaborate with terrorist groups
- Conceptual paradigms:
  - Nexus, intersections, hybrids (e.g., drugs & terror)
  - Continuum (groups shifting incrementally)
  - Transformation (ASG, FARC becoming less political, more criminal; Mexican cartels embracing terrorist tactics)

First of all, both criminals and terrorists have much in common – they are, for the most part, rational actors; they operate secretly, they use some kinds of similar tactics (like kidnapping, extortion, and assassination).<sup>2</sup>

They may have different motives, yes, but they also pursue the same kinds of interests, in that both criminals and terrorists need to acquire resources and power in order to achieve their objectives

The scholarly literature offers a variety of conceptual paradigms to try and help us understand the links between crime and terrorism. For example, researchers have described this as a nexus, a confluence, or some other kind of phenomenon involving fluid, constantly changing relationships among members of terrorist and criminal networks.<sup>3</sup> Others have described this in terms of a continuum, where a particular group shifts back and forth along a spectrum

between political and criminal activities. Some groups have transformed themselves—like the FARC in Colombia and the Abu Sayyaf Group in the Philippines, which have slowly moved away from their original commitment to political violence and more toward increasing levels of purely criminal activity. At the same time, we have criminal groups – like several Mexican drug cartels – that have been increasingly adopting tactics of public violence that are more commonly associated with terrorist groups.<sup>4</sup>

And finally, we also have seen a significant increase over the last two decades of globalized crime groups (as compared to the locally oriented groups that have been common for much longer); These transnational or globalized crime groups are believed to be less concerned about their local/state context, and because of this researchers argue they are more likely to collaborate with terrorist groups.

**COLLABORATION TYPES**

- Strategic alliances
  - Long-term commitments; shared intelligence, revenues, etc.
- Transactional supply chain relationships
  - Often based on territorial control by each group
- Tactical alliances
  - Short-term, in response to perceived mutual threat
- Sub-contract relationships
  - Often based on unique/specialized capabilities
- Spot sales and barter agreements
  - Like drugs for explosives (Madrid 2004)

- Adapted from Phil Williams (2002) and Annette Idler (2012)

- **Core issue: Not really group linkages (no MOU), but more inter-personal, sub-group relationships, w/trusted handshakes facilitating collaboration**
- **Individual facilitators are the heart of collaboration**

Of course, as Phil Williams, Annette Idler and others have noted, there are several forms of collaboration between criminal organizations and terrorist groups, including:<sup>5</sup>

- Strategic alliances, which are generally described as long-term commitments in which both entities share intelligence, revenues, and so forth. These are very rare, from what the scholarly research suggests
- A more common form of collaboration is the transactional supply chain relationships, which are typically based on territorial control by each group, and a need to collaborate in order to move product or services to consumers. We see a good deal of this kind of collaboration among paramilitary groups and drug cartels operating throughout Colombia's border regions, as Annette Idler has shown in her research.
- These are somewhat similar to tactical alliances, which are also short-term, and usually formed in response to a perceived mutual threat. For example, we know that in Iraq after the 2003 invasion a variety of politically-minded insurgent groups collaborated with criminal gangs in a number of ways.

- Then there are sub-contract relationships, which are often based on unique/specialized capabilities; for example, few terrorist groups are very adept at money laundering and document forgery, especially passports; several organized crime groups, however, have developed a strong reputation for expertise in these areas.
- And finally, another interesting form of collaboration involves the quick and dirty transactions, like the exchange of drugs for explosives that we saw in the Madrid attacks in 2004.

But throughout these and other forms of collaboration, one core issue seems to stand out in all the research literature – criminal and terrorist linkages, where we find them, are forged and maintained primarily at the level of individual relationships. With few exceptions, there are no formal organizational-level signed agreements, no memoranda of understanding, or other such things. Rather, collaborative efforts among clandestine networks engaged in illicit activities are most often facilitated at the individual level through “trusted handshakes”—personal bonds established through shared ethnic, tribal, religious, or community affiliation, or by mutual background experiences, like prison or years of suffering imposed by a brutally oppressive regime. Overall, then, individuals are at the heart of intersections between crime and terror.

## “THREAT CONVERGENCE”

- Focused on **specific geopolitical contexts** (like weak, failing, transitioning states, ungoverned spaces, border regions, etc.) that provide opportunities for crime-terror collaboration
- Activities of concern within these spaces include WMD proliferation, cyberspace, other kinds of security threats in which criminal enterprises are engaged

*Criminal networks are not only expanding their operations, but they are also diversifying their activities, resulting in a convergence of transnational threats that has evolved to become more complex, volatile, and destabilizing.*

- President Barack Obama, 2011

Now, let me say a few words about the topic of Threat Convergence, which is becoming an increasingly popular term among the academic and policy communities. The way this term is used mostly is in reference to specific geopolitical contexts (like weak, failing, transitioning states, ungoverned spaces, border regions, etc.) that provide opportunities for crime-terror collaboration to take place.<sup>6</sup>

Clearly, a whole range of clandestine network activities could take place in these kinds of worrisome contexts, from WMD proliferation, to kidnapping and human trafficking, weapons and drugs trafficking, cyber-attacks, and many other

kinds of security threats in which criminal enterprises are engaged. The lack of good governance here leads to contexts in which we tend to see more kinds of motivations and opportunities for the kinds of personal and group interactions I've just mentioned.

And this recent quote from President Obama (see slide above) reflects the level of concern that in these kinds of places, criminal networks are expanding and diversifying their activities, and in doing so, they are contributing to new kinds of security threats that we need to deal with – including the possibility that a terrorist attack using a weapon of mass destruction could be just over the horizon.



The slide has a dark blue background with white text. The title 'FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES' is at the top in a serif font, with a small graphic of three curved lines to its right. Below the title is a list of five bullet points. The third bullet point is bolded and underlined.

- Global access to materials, technologies, knowledge
  - Organized criminals have shown capabilities to move goods, funds anywhere in the world
  - Global markets = more opportunities for profit
- Internationally linked **criminal markets** in which various actors, including terrorists and insurgents, engage in profit-seeking activities
- **No indication that demand for drugs, weapons, illicit sexual services, etc. will decline any time soon**
- Experiences lead to expansion of trusted handshakes; patterns of successful collaboration can lead to more trust & willingness for future collaboration
- Governance challenges in dozens of countries worldwide

So, why do most researchers and policymakers think that we are likely to see an increase in these kinds of crime-terror interactions in the future?

Well, for one thing there is great concern that globalization has made it easier for terrorist groups to access materials, technologies, and knowledge; globalization has also helped organized crime groups become increasingly adept at moving goods and money anywhere in the world. In short, we have increasingly global markets now, and for the sophisticated groups – the ones we worry most about – this means there are now more opportunities for profit.

Further, within these internationally linked criminal markets, various actors, including terrorists and insurgents, are engaging in their own profit-seeking activities.<sup>7</sup> For example, probably everyone in this room is familiar with the Taliban's involvement in the global opium trade. Sadly, there is no indication that the worldwide demand for drugs, weapons, illicit sexual services, and so forth will decline any time soon, thus the profit incentive will remain for the foreseeable future.

And finally, an increase in criminal-terrorist collaboration is also considered likely because over time, individual and group experiences lead to an expansion of trusted handshakes; patterns of successful collaboration can lead to more trust & willingness for future collaboration among these groups. Just like

in the Business-to-Business world, if you know you can depend on a particular partner for meeting certain needs for your organization, it frees you up to focus on other objectives.



## WHERE?

- Spaces conducive to threat convergence include wherever state authority is in question, corruption and violence is high, regulation is light, and there is high level of access to the infrastructure of globalization
- Concerns:
  - Places of ongoing conflict, lots of weapons, violence, low human security (Mexico, Pakistan, Syria, Nigeria, Colombia, DRC, Caucasus)
  - Transitioning state governments (Tunisia, Egypt, Libya)
  - Border insecurity (North Africa; Tri-Border Area)
  - Urban “zones of competing governance” (Diaspora enclaves, often certain neighborhoods in large metropolitan areas; rules, laws are enforced, but not by govt. Also, southern Lebanon, Hizballah is a prime example)
  - Online – lots of unregulated space in which certain kinds of crime-terror collaboration can be facilitated

The research literature also suggests that there are certain kinds of places in which we are more likely than others to see this kind of activity. For example,

Studies have suggested that threat convergence is more likely wherever state authority is in question, corruption and violence is high, regulation is light, and there is high level of access to the infrastructure of globalization

There are also concerns about places of ongoing conflict, where we find lots of weapons, daily acts of violence, and overall a low level of human security – this would include places like Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria, Nigeria, the Kurdish region of southern Turkey, various parts of Colombia and Mexico, the Democratic Republic of Congo and other parts of central Africa, and the Caucasus region, among many others.

The research also suggests that crime and terrorism could intersect in places where a transitioning state government means that law enforcement and security personnel are distracted and there are several reports that focus on the global threats associated with insecure borders in places like North Africa, the Afghan-Pakistan tribal regions, or the Tri-Border Area of South America.

Studies have described the security challenges that come from so-called “zones of competing governance” – in addition to problematic borders and tribal regions, these also include urban spaces in large sprawling metropolitan areas, often neighborhoods in which gangs (and sometimes ethnic diaspora leaders) make their own rules.

And finally, there is the vast unregulated space of the Internet, where various kinds of crime-terror collaboration can be facilitated, from sharing knowledge and resources to coordinated cyber attacks against a government perceived as a common enemy.

## SUMMARY

- General understanding of converging threats, but more and better data & research needed
  - Group characteristics
    - *Need to know goals, capabilities, leadership, support networks, interpersonal relationships*
  - Context
    - *Need to study where, when, new kinds of opportunities*
    - *Need to map illicit markets and their participants*
  - Assessing impact of how we respond to both crime and terror
- Responding to crime-terror ‘threat convergence’
  - Transnational collaboration
  - “whole of community” (governments, NGOs, broader population)

So, to conclude this brief overview, the academic community has put forward an impressive variety of concepts and paradigms to help us understand the nature of criminal and terrorist interactions. However, while there is a general understanding of converging threats, we need more and better data & research than what we currently have. For example, we really need to know as much as we can about the characteristics that matter about a specific group – its goals, capabilities, leadership, support networks, interpersonal relationships and so forth – in order to assess their potential likelihood of collaboration. Intelligence on individual group members is critical. As I mentioned earlier, individuals are at the heart of intersections between crime and terror – thus, we need to know all we can about individuals involved in criminal and terrorist groups.

Equally as important, because crime – terror interactions are a very contextual phenomenon, we need to study where and under what conditions we might see new kinds of opportunities for convergence or collaboration. One important dimension of this involves mapping the world of illicit markets and their participants – choose any illicit good, and determine all the different sources of origin, all the different facilitators, runners, routes, and consumer markets for that product, and then combine that data with what we know about the participants that we find engaged in that market.

Finally, one area of research that is sorely lacking involves assessing the impact of how we respond to both crime and terror. Here, it is not only our own country’s response that matters – we need broad cross-national studies as well, in order to learn new ideas from each other and to find ways in which governments can more effectively collaborate in response to this threat.

This brings me to my final point - responding to the kinds of crime-terror interactions and potential threat convergence that I have described here requires a great deal of transnational collaboration. No single nation on its own can effectively thwart the most challenging cases of threat convergence, particularly given the transnational nature of several criminal and terrorist groups today.

But we also need to keep in mind that government assets are not the only ones that should be brought to bear in dealing with this problem. In many cases, as I learned in my recent study in northern Nigeria, a “whole of community” approach is needed, through which governments collaborate with local community-based entities, religious organizations, NGOs, and the broader population in gathering the kind of street knowledge and intelligence necessary to effectively confront the threat of organized crime and terrorism

Thank you.



## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> This presentation draws from a recent article, "Criminals and Terrorists": An Introduction to the Special Issue," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 24(2) (March 2012)
- <sup>2</sup> Alex P. Schmid, "The Links between Transnational Organized Crime and Terrorist Crimes," *Transnational Organized Crime* 2, No. 2 (Winter 1996), p. 66-67.
- <sup>3</sup> Tamara Makarenko, "The Ties the Bind: Uncovering the Relationship between Organized Crime and Terrorism," in *Global Organized Crime: Trends and Developments*, edited by Dina Siegel, Henk Van De Bunt and Damian Zaitch (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2003), p. 159-70; R. T. Naylor, *Wages of Crime: Black Markets, Illegal Finance and the Underworld of Economy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), p. 44-87; Chris Dishman, "Terrorism, Crime and Transformation," *Studies of Conflict and Terrorism*, vol. 24, no. 1 (2001), p. 43-58; Thomas M. Sanderson, "Transnational Terror and Organized Crime: Blurring the Lines," *SAIS Review*, vol. 24, no. 1 (Winter-Spring 2004), p. 49-61; Rachel Ehrenfeld, *Funding Evil: How Terrorism is Financed, and How to Stop it* (Chicago: Bonus Books, 2003); Louise Shelley and John Picarelli "The Diversity of the Crime-Terror Interaction," *International Annals of Criminology* vol. 43 (2005), p. 51-81; Louise Shelley and John Picarelli "Organized Crime and Terrorism," in *Terrorism Financing and State Responses: A Comparative Perspective*, edited by Jeanne Giraldo and Harold Trinkunas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 39-55.
- <sup>4</sup> For specific examples, please see the articles by Phil Williams, Vera Eccarius-Kelly and Shawn Teresa Flanigan in the special issue of the journal *Terrorism and Political Violence*, vol. 24, No. 2 (March 2012) on "Intersections of Crime and Terror."
- <sup>5</sup> Phil Williams, "Cooperation Among Criminal Organizations", in Mats Berdal and Mónica Serrano, eds., *Transnational Organized Crime and International Security: Business as Usual?* (Boulder, CO and London: Lynne Rienner, 2002), 67-80, 68; and Annette Idler, "Arrangements of Convenience in Colombia's Borderlands: An Invisible Threat to Citizen Security?", *St Antony's International Review*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 2012.
- <sup>6</sup> For more on Threat Convergence, see the Fund for Peace website at: <http://www.fundforpeace.org/global/?q=program-threatconvergence>; and Joshua Sinai and James J.F. Forest, "Threat Convergence: A Framework for Analyzing the Potential for WMD Terrorism," in *Weapons of Mass Destruction and Terrorism*, edited by James J.F. Forest and Russell Howard (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2012).
- <sup>7</sup> For more on this, see John T. Picarelli, "Osama bin Corleone? Vito the Jackal? Framing Threat Convergence Through an Examination of Transnational Organized Crime and International Terrorism," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 24(2) (March, 2012).