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# Terrorism and Crime: Critical Linkages

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# Terrorism and Crime: Critical Linkages

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### OBJECTIVE

This paper is an effort to analyze past terrorist activities within the context of present and future activities.

### FAILED STATES, CRIME, AND TERRORISM

The latter decades of the twentieth century witnessed a proliferation of new nation states. Some were products of the demise of colonialism while others were created by the collapse of the Soviet Union. A consistent characteristic of those new regimes was their lack of efficacy. One reflection of this deficiency is the proliferation of criminal activities and terrorist organizations within their jurisdictions,

### TERRORIST-CRIMINAL COORDINATION

Typologies of terrorist groups attempt to place groups in distinct and presumably mutually exclusive categories. Reality, however, is much more complex and groups routinely embrace multiple motives for their activities. International terrorism and organized crime both pose serious and evolving challenges to U.S. national security interests. Terrorists and criminals have coordinated for mutual gain, providing physical protection in exchange for monetary gain and other mutual beneficial transactions. The specific dynamics vary from region to region, country to country. Ominously, there is potential for greater cooperation along the criminal-terrorist axis.

### MOTIVATIONAL DYNAMICS AND CONSTRAINTS

There are, however, constraints to sustained high-level cooperation among these groups. Alliances are numerous but may be temporary because groups embrace different primary motives. Criminal groups traffic in illicit goods and services to maximize profits, whereas terrorists traffic in violence to maximize power. Of course, there are also "gray areas" where political, religious, and criminal motivations mix with one another. Some alliances are clearly marriages of convenience but others result from leadership transformations.

### TERRORIST-CRIMINAL THREAT ASSESSMENT

Terrorist-criminal links in Former Soviet Union (FSU) countries pose one of the greatest potential threats to U.S. security, as many of these states are rent with economic instability, political turmoil, and religious fervor. Given sufficient profit incentives, criminal groups may be tempted to steal nuclear materials from poorly guarded Russian facilities and sell them to terrorist groups. The flight of Al Qaeda affiliates from Afghanistan into Central Asia following the US-led military intervention in 2001 has exacerbated this problem. Over the longer term, the evolving nature of terrorist-criminal links in FSU countries and elsewhere will depend on several wildcards, including inter-state war, famine, pestilence, and large-scale migrations.

## INTRODUCTION

Since 2001, our attention has been focused on International terrorism. However, both international terrorism and organized crime pose serious and evolving challenges to U.S. national security interests. Terrorist-criminal links are evident in virtually every region of the world. Some terrorist and criminal groups have coordinated for mutual gain, exchanging protection for money, as well as other mutually beneficial transactions. Though there is certainly potential for greater cooperation along the criminal-terrorist axis, there are also constraints that will limit such coordination. After all, terrorist and criminal groups are driven by different motives and sustained coordination requires a high degree of operational security.



May 12, 1972 Baader-Meinhof bombing outside the federal police Munich Office.



Building 131 at Khobar Towers, Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, after the June 25, 1996 terrorist bombing.

Terrorism has been a focal point of research and analysis since the 1970s, when terrorist hijackings and kidnappings attracted international press coverage. International criminal organizations have garnered more recent attention, most of it since the Cold War ended. Most studies tend to treat the two phenomena independently, or to lump them together under the rubric of "narcoterrorism." This analysis will examine and compare terrorism and criminal groups with respect to their motivations (and in particular those in Latin America and the former Soviet Union), organization, and modus operandi.

Even before the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, terrorists had inflicted devastating strikes on the United States, including the October 2000 attack on the USS Cole, the August 1998 destruction of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, the June 1996 bombing on Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia, and the February 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center in New York.

In addition to killing innocents and destroying property, major terrorist attacks have forced democratic governments to make dramatic policy concessions. Terrorist strikes have prompted the following actions: U.S. military withdrawal from Beirut in 1983 after the attack on the Marine barracks there; Israel's decision to enter serious negotiations with the Palestine Liberation Organization, and pullout from southern Lebanon in 2000; and the United Kingdom's decision to negotiate with Sinn Fein, the political front of the Irish Republican Army. On the eve of the Spanish elections in 2004, attacks on the Madrid train system apparently resulted in a change of administration and a reversal of Spanish support for US and UK military operations in Iraq.

International criminal organizations also threaten U.S. national security. Increased international trade and advances in telecommunications have extended the tentacle-like reach of those

groups; they threaten nascent democracies, corrupt ruling elites, undermine the rule of law, and cost states billions of dollars in drug prevention, interdiction and treatment programs. Sometimes they forge opportunistic links with international terrorists for mutual gain. An inability to control rampant criminality is a major factor in what is often seen as an epidemic of regime failure in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## MOTIVATIONS CONTRASTED

Operating outside the norms of civilized behavior, terrorists use violence and the threat of violence against noncombatants to achieve political or religious ends. International terrorists operate across state borders. Some terrorist groups enjoy political, diplomatic, material, or financial assistance from state-sponsors or emigrant communities abroad; others rely on indigenous forms of support. In the past, nations such as Iraq and Libya made significant contributions to international terrorism by way of their diplomatic pouches.

All terrorist groups traffic in violence. Though some engage in ordinary criminal behavior as well, it is not their driving motivation, but a means to an end. Brazilian terrorist Carlos Marighella, author of *The Minimanual of Urban Guerrilla Warfare*, encouraged bank robberies as a means to fund terrorist activity. Groups as diverse as the IRA in Northern Ireland, the Kurdish Workers' Party in the Middle East, and Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka, have raised money for terrorist ends with diverse criminal activities. Joseph Stalin's first significant contributions to the Bolshevik revolution were bank robberies throughout the Caucasus region.

In contrast, international criminal groups engage in illicit, cross-border activities, but are motivated by financial incentives. Sometimes they use terrorist tactics, including extortion, kidnapping and murder, to reap profits.

Older forms of criminal behavior, such as maritime piracy, remain very much modern problems.

"Piracy," *The Economist*, December 18, 1999, pp. 91-93.

International criminals engage in a stunning range of activity. A partial list of criminal enterprises would include narcotics production, trafficking, and distribution; money laundering and counterfeiting; illicit arms and munitions transfers; kidnapping and extortion; human smuggling, prostitution, and child pornography; and trade in endangered flora and fauna. Criminal organizations transport their illegal goods by every imaginable mode of transportation, from jet aircraft to human "mules" who swallow condoms filled with narcotics.

In 2005 the simultaneous gas attacks on four "Maksidom" stores in Russia had characteristics of an Al Qaeda type incident but were actually motivated by criminal intentions.



It is not surprising that the activities of criminal organizations are often mistaken for those of terrorist groups. Initial and hasty news reports contribute to widespread confusion about violent incidents. For example, the 2005 gas attacks on four "Maksidom" stores in St. Petersburg, Russia were immediately described as a terrorist attack. The simultaneous incidents involved the use of devices associated with terrorist groups and the planning resembled that of Islamic fundamentalist attacks in London earlier that year. Subsequent investigations, however, revealed this large Russian home improvements chain had been threatened by commercial rivals who proclaimed their intention to ruin the store's Christmas sales. Authorities found no links with terrorist attacks associated with Islamic groups in Russia's North Caucasus region.<sup>1</sup>



Federal prosecutors tape Mexican Mafia operating in Los Angeles, September 1997.

"Narcotics remain the most profitable enterprise for international criminal organizations; but trafficking in people is the fastest growing."

Barbara Crossette, "U.N. Warns That Trafficking In Human Beings Is Growing," The New York Times, June 25, 2000, p. 9.

International criminal organizations are often referred to as "cartels." Strictly speaking, the term is a misnomer because the groups do not collude to fix the price of their products. Another popular term, "narcoterrorism," is misleading to the extent it suggests all narcotics traffickers engage in terrorism, or that all terrorists traffic in narcotics. Those dynamics vary depending on the region and actors involved. Some groups embrace narcotics trafficking as a source of revenue; others abstain from such links. In Central Asia, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan is noted for its involvement in drug trafficking while more devout Hizb ut-Tahrir, regarded by the Russian government as a terrorist organization, eschews such activities.<sup>2</sup> Even terrorists draw distinctions among themselves. Nicolas Rodriguez, leader of Colombia's ELN, has tried to distinguish his group's financing from the FARC's drug funding.

<sup>1</sup> [WWW.newsru.com](http://WWW.newsru.com), 27 December 2005

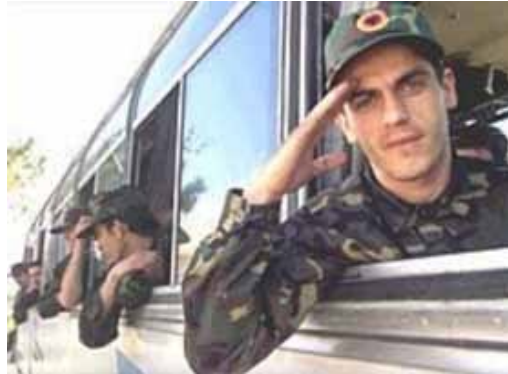
<sup>2</sup> Ariel Cohen, Ph.D., *Russia and Eurasia: Hizb ut-Tahrir*, The Heritage Foundation, 2005, [www.heritage.org/Research/RussiaandEurasia](http://www.heritage.org/Research/RussiaandEurasia)

The key distinction, then, between international terrorist groups and their criminal counterparts involves motivation. Criminal organizations traffic in illicit goods and services to maximize profits; terrorists traffic in violence to maximize political power. When captured and prosecuted, terrorists routinely turn their trials into political theater. In contrast, criminals generally deny their wrongdoing or plea bargain and become informants against former partners.

Despite their different motivations, there are points of contact, even overlap, between terrorists and their criminal counterparts. That reality does not invalidate the analytical distinction between terrorists and criminals; instead, it indicates the presence of "gray areas" where political, religious, and criminal motivations mix with one another.

## GRAY AREAS: The Former Soviet Union and the Balkans

Terrorist and criminal motivations often overlap with groups operating in the FSU and the Balkans. The former Yugoslavia has proven fertile soil for hybrid organizations. In Kosovo, for example, the Kosovo Liberation Army's (KLA) links with drug traffickers and international criminals have been well-documented. The KLA used those connections, as well as contributions from Albanian emigrant communities abroad, to fund its paramilitary campaign against Serbian authorities.



KLA successfully recruited thousands of ethnic Albanians for battle in Kosovo.



Zeljko Raznatovic (aka "Arkan") claimed he was member of Yugoslavian "National Guard." He was killed January 15, 2000.

Serbia itself has become a haven of international criminal activity. Serbian criminal groups operating abroad help fund militia groups in the Balkans. Zeljko Raznatovic ("Arkan the Cat") recruited his ethnic cleansers from a network of criminals. Arkan robbed banks and jewelry stores in Western Europe before leading his ruthless paramilitaries in the Croatian and Bosnian wars in the early 1990's.

According to INDEM, a non-governmental non-profit public association based in Moscow, corruption in post-Soviet Russia has escalated to such an extent that the country is in danger of becoming a criminal-syndicalist state. Institutionalized corruption there has paralleled the growth of international criminal organizations. Routine interactions between citizens and the federal bureaucracy typically involve bribery. In its annual report, INDEM maintains that bribes paid to officials by businessmen may have increased ten fold over the last four years. The amount of these bribes is over twice the size of the entire Russian state budget. Corruption in the military has become a serious problem as well, fueling the black market for illicit arms and raising the specter of disgruntled personnel trafficking biological, chemical, or perhaps even nuclear weapons. The military is also plagued by bribery as parents pay to avoid military service for their children while the universities accept and perhaps expect bribes to guarantee such children a place in the university.<sup>3</sup>

As a transitional nation, it is Russia is enduring social, political, and economic changes which, not surprisingly create conditions conducive to crime. Since the deterioration of the Soviet state in the late 1980s and its collapse in 1991, numerous studies have explored this phenomenon. Marx and subsequent Marxist-Leninist theoreticians had argued that their system, by its very nature, insured that criminality would not long exist. The reality is very different and the prospects for the

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<sup>3</sup> Steven Eke, "Corruption 'Skyrockets' in Russia", *BBC News*, 20 July, 2005

stability of post-communist regimes are significantly limited by the explosion of crime in recent years.<sup>4</sup>

Russia is home base for an estimated 8,000 criminal gangs. Of those, at least 200 operate worldwide. After the fall of the Soviet Union, Russian crime groups expanded their reach in successive waves, penetrating the FSU; Central and Western Europe, with heavy activity in Germany and Italy; South and Southeast Asia; and Latin and North America. Russian criminal groups help transport narcotics from the Golden Triangle and the Golden Crescent to Western Europe. Kazakhstan provides a natural conduit for Southeast Asian heroin flowing into Russia. Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan provide routes for Southwest Asian heroin—mostly from Afghanistan—into Russia.

Sizeable criminal groups have emerged in virtually all the FSU states. Significant players include Armenians, Azerbaijanis, Dagestanis, Georgians, and Ingush. The Chechens are widely recognized as the most "ruthless and ambitious Caucasian criminals." They operate in numerous FSU countries, Western Europe and North America. The Russians have blamed them for terrorist bombings in Moscow and numerous other cities with a death toll rising to more than 300 people per year by 2000. In the following years, the toll has continued to rise, far exceeding what was, in its time, regarded as a devastating figure.

Chechen clans fiercely oppose Russian authority, a fact that was demonstrated by the 1994-96 war in Chechnya and the more recent conflicts that were sparked in 1999. Those clans are driven by a protean blend of political, religious, and criminal motivations. Some have engaged in terrorist activity, targeting of civilians with assassination and hostage-taking.

Rebel leaders like Shamil Basayev, Ameer Khattab (aka Habib Abdul Rahman), and Abu Daba should not be dismissed or underestimated as mere warlords; they have sustained sophisticated political-military campaigns against Russian authorities, requiring complex financial, logistical, and combat operations. They also have mobilized Wahhabi extremists and Afghani mercenaries to further their own objectives.



Jordanian-born Gen. Shamil Basayev insists he did not bomb Moscow in 1999.

Their financial support is derived from several sources. Since the second Chechen war, Chechnya has been plagued by lawlessness and, in this environment, criminals enjoy enormous profits by stealing oil, running kidnapping networks, and diverting money that was intended for reconstruction projects.

The siphoning of oil from pipelines is the most common method of petroleum theft. Chechen groups have long targeted the Baku-Novorossiisk pipeline which passes through Chechnya. The theft and illegal refining of oil has become one of the most consistent income sources for Chechen criminal organizations. Ingushetia, Dagestan and North Ossetia have become dependent on these illegal petroleum transactions. Supporters of the late Chechen President Akhmad Kadyrov have developed a more sophisticated method of petroleum theft. Known as the

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<sup>4</sup> William Alex Pridemore, *Ruling Russia : Law, Crime, and Justice in a Changing Society*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2005, pp. 10-21



'Kadyrovtsy', these individuals have devised a system for stealing directly from oil wells and, with the connivance of security forces, helping run improvised petroleum refineries.<sup>5</sup>

In order to protect against diversion of gas supplies, the government was forced to establish the oil regiment, a police organization that specializes in responding to this activity.

Trafficking in illegal arms was, until recent years, a major source of criminal funding for terrorism in Chechnya. Between 1996 and 1999, the years in which Grozny, Chechnya's capitol city, was in the hands of rebel forces, there was an open, legal arms bazaar in the city centre. Small arms such as machine guns, pistols, and hand grenades could be freely purchased at very reasonable prices. In the current environment of routine police searches, private ownership of weapons has become less common and terrorists are less dependent on weapons sales to finance their activities in Chechnya.

Kidnappings and narcotics traffic provide them with additional revenue. Chechnya's hostage business dramatically escalated after 1997 when a Russian television crew was ransomed for an estimated one million dollars. After 2000 when rebel forces fled Grozny, Chechen terrorists found that senior Russian military officers could be forced to pay up to \$300 for the body of each serviceman who died in combat.<sup>6</sup>

Few groups have demonstrated the linkage between crime and terrorism more dramatically than the Special Purpose Islamic Regiment (SPIR) which was formed as a purely criminal group following the first Chechen war. When the war resumed in 1999, SPIR expanded its objectives to include terrorist activities against the Russian government. Gang leader Arbi Barayev, who comes from one of Chechnya's most prominent criminal families, forged an alliance with Islamic militants who could generate foreign sources of funding for the gang. Eventually, the SPIR evolved from a purely criminal gang into a complex organization advocating militant Islam and Chechen nationalism.<sup>7</sup>

The large Chechen diaspora also has helped sustain terrorist and criminal activity in Chechnya. Operating in refugee camps all the way from Moldova into Western Europe, the overseas Chechens have represented an important reserve component for Chechen gangs.

Muslim governments in the Middle East did not originally support the Chechen efforts to achieve political independence, despite previous support for the Bosnian Muslims and Kosovar Albanians in the Balkans. The Caucasus and Balkans each have a distinctive religious milieu. The Chechens are Muslim, but they traditionally practiced Sufism, a mystical variant of Islam that is rejected by Middle East regimes. In Chechnya, the organizational links are primarily clan-based and Nakshbandi Sufism has long been the predominant religious tie among the brotherhoods. Furthermore, the nationalism of the early Chechen fighters ran counter to the internationalism of Islamic fundamentalists such as Al Qaeda.

In recent years and especially since the Al Qaeda attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, Islamic militant groups from the Middle East have become a more significant factor in this region. According to a State Department annual report on terrorism, even before 2001, there was "evidence of substantial financial support reaching the Chechen and Dagestan rebels from the Arab world, along with scores of volunteers from Egypt, Pakistan and Afghanistan." Moreover, the Chechen rebels have "received some support from foreign mujahideen with extensive links to Middle Eastern, South Asian, and Central Asian Islamic extremists, as well as Osama Bin Ladin."

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<sup>5</sup> Timur Aliyev, "War Racketeers Plague Chechnya", *Moscow News*, 11 January 2005

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> "Group Profile: Special Purpose Islamic Regiment", Terrorism Knowledge Base, [www.tkb.org](http://www.tkb.org)

The Chechen emigrant community in Jordan is particularly strong, with some 10,000 members, and exhibits a high degree of activism in pursuit of Chechen goals.

### GRAY AREAS: Latin America

In Latin America, criminal and terrorist links are well-established. Beginning in the 1980s, the Maoist Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path), one of the region's most violent groups, aligned itself with coca growers and narcotics traffickers operating out of the Huallaga Basin. The terrorist group provided protection in exchange for taxes. The revenue helped sustain the insurgency, providing money for arms, munitions, and other operational expenses. The Shining Path established a department of organizational support that played a crucial logistical role in the group's operations. One member of that department, former ballerina Maritza Garrido Lecca, who received a twenty year sentence in 2005 for providing shelter for the Shining Path leader, was the subject of the popular novel *The Dancer Upstairs* by Nicholas Shakespeare as well as a movie based on the novel.<sup>8</sup> The Shining Path model has been adopted, in varied degrees, by several other Latin American terrorist groups, including the FARC and the ELN.



Colombian terrorists rely on funding from narcotics and kidnappings.

With an estimated 12,000-15,000 troops, the FARC is the largest terrorist group in Latin America. In the 1980s, it became involved in narcotics trafficking to further its political aims. Its revenue from narcotics traffic exceeds more than \$500 million a year. The ELN, Colombia's second largest terrorist organization, also relies on narcotics trafficking for funding, though to a much lesser extent. This group prefers high-profile kidnappings, including one in 1999 that involved 160 church hostages in Cali.

A rightist paramilitary group, the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), is involved in the narcotics trade as well. Led by Carlos Castano, the AUC has admitted its involvement in the

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<sup>8</sup> Jeremy McDermott, "Ex-ballerina gets 20 years in jail for letting rebels hide in her home", *The Scotsman*, 6 October 2005.

drug trade, justifying it as necessary to cover their operational expenses. In 2001, the US Department of State designated the AUC as a foreign terrorist organization under U.S. law. In 2003, following the reevaluation of the State Department's list, the AUC was re-designated as a foreign terrorist organization.<sup>9</sup>

The election of Evo Morales to the Bolivian presidency in 2005 raised further questions about the political future of South America. The leftist agenda his political party, the Movement Toward Socialism, his background as a former coca leaf-grower, and his advocacy of legalization of coca production raised legitimate concerns that Bolivia under Morales might become a contributing factor to the "narcoterrorist" tendency seen in recent years.<sup>10</sup>

Foreign governments will often minimize evidence of criminal activity when negotiating with terrorist insurgencies. Shortly after his election, Colombian President Andres Pastrana Arango launched peace talks with both FARC and the ELN for the first time in eight years. President Pastrana has claimed that the FARC's involvement in narcotics is limited, despite ample evidence to the contrary.



Andrés Pastrana Arango,  
President of Colombia

## ORGANIZATION

### LEADERS

All terrorist and criminal groups involve some form of hierarchy. Traditionally, terrorist leaders have appeared more important to their organizations than their criminal counterparts. In the past, the capture or death of a leader very often crippled a terrorist group, as happened to the Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) in Peru after the government apprehended Abimael Guzman Reynoso in September 1992. Guzman was succeeded by Principal Regional Committee leader Oscar Alberto Ramirez Durand (alias "Feliciano") who, in turn, was captured by government forces in July 1999. Neither Durand nor his successor, Filomeno Cerron Cardoso (alias "Artemio"), has reversed the group's decline. Much speculation has surrounded the question of Osama bin Laden's importance to Al Qaeda and whether or not the organization would survive his death.

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<sup>9</sup> US Department of State Press Statement, 10 September 2003.

<sup>10</sup> "Leftist Claims Victory in Bolivia", *BBC News*, 19 December 2005

In Europe, the 1999 capture of PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan dealt a serious blow to his organization. For the most part, his supporters have been reduced to protesting his incarceration and granting his release. Also in 1999, the capture of group leader Ta Mok helped doom the Khmer Rouge as a viable terrorist insurgency in Asia.



Abimael Guzman Reynoso lecturing the press after his capture.

Typically, the death or capture of a criminal organization leader often has only a marginal impact. In the mid-1990s, for example, Colombia authorities arrested or induced the surrender of seven leaders of the Cali crime syndicate. Smaller groups quickly stepped in to fill the vacuum left by Cali's dismemberment. Similarly, the death of Pablo Escobar, leader of the Medellin criminal organization, in 1993, had little impact on the flow of narcotics traffic into the United States. Colombia remains the hub of narcotics activity; coca cultivation and leaf production has increased there every year since 1995.

In contrast with terrorist organizations, criminal groups often have dynastic leadership structures. In countries as diverse as Mexico, Sicily, and Russia, criminal groups often involve family-based structures. For example, the Red Mafia organization is reportedly led by the Ukrainian-born Semion Mogilevich and to include many of his relatives.

The vulnerability of terrorist groups to the loss of a leader has diminished with the development of the cellular structure more often associated with Islamic fundamentalist groups. This change is a function of a disturbing trend in which groups have developed important organizational learning skills. Such adaptability is an indication of sophistication thought to be beyond the reach of Middle Eastern terrorist groups and has been demonstrated by a variety of terrorist groups outside the Middle East. Key to this development has been recognition of the fact that terrorist violence means that there will be personnel losses and that an institutionalization of knowledge is essential to retention of a group's fighting capability. Effective organizational learning skills are developed within an organization and, for that reason, are difficult to study from outside the group.<sup>11</sup>

More generally, many international terrorist and criminal groups maintain an ethnic or racial composition that makes it more difficult for outsiders to infiltrate. The closed nature of some of the ethnic communal groups to outsiders, enhanced by language barriers and an identification of police as the enemy, makes immigrant communities ideal recruiting and operation grounds for criminal organizations. A major barrier to effective counterterrorist operations during the war on terrorism has been Western difficulties in penetrating such communities. In 2004, former FBI translator Sibel D. Edmonds observed that a language barrier and a cultural divide were inhibiting federal efforts to secure accurate translations of Arab language sources. Some native speakers, according to Edmonds, deliberately mistranslated documents as an expression of their hostility toward the United States. Officials have noted that because there is a chronic shortage of Arabic translators, many agencies have been forced to hire many Middle Eastern immigrants whose backgrounds cannot be thoroughly checked.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Brian Jackson, et al, *Organizational Learning in Terrorist Groups and Its Implications for Combating Terrorism*, RAND, 2005, pp. 24-26

<sup>12</sup> Paul Sperry, "FBI Arab Translators and 11 September", *WND*, 7 January 2004

## ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES

Individuals with professional and technical skills are readily found in sophisticated criminal syndicates. They use computers and advanced technology to manage their financial affairs, track accounts, effect wire transfers, and encrypt communications. Equipped with cutting-edge commercial technology, advanced criminal organizations often outstrip the technical capabilities of states trying to pursue them. Those advantages often allow the groups to innovate criminal activity faster than legal authorities can respond. The use of computers and other communications technologies by terrorist groups, however, can backfire, as government authorities occasionally capture hard drives and diskettes containing valuable files and intercept cell and satellite phone conversations. Satellite phones are generally presumed to have been a major tool in Osama bin Laden's escape from US troops in Afghanistan in 2001.

Like large corporations, sophisticated criminal and terrorist groups require a division of labor. Desired professions include accountants, marketing specialists, managers, communications experts, money launderers, intelligence and counterintelligence specialists. Criminal groups also place a high value on economists and lawyers. Terrorist groups have recruited military personnel in hope of exploiting their professional expertise. Individuals with the required skills command generous salaries for their services.

Some criminal groups have made aggressive forays into computer crime and bank fraud. The full extent of such penetration is unknown, as financial institutions are generally loath to admit their vulnerabilities. Criminal groups also have exploited a wide range of off-shore banking facilities to launder their profits.

Like their terrorist counterparts, criminal organizations vary in size; they may involve anywhere from a few dozen to several thousand workers. Small terrorist groups and solo terrorists are usually more difficult to track and apprehend; they can remain dormant for months, even years.

Though terrorist organizations may have thousands of passive sympathizers, the number of active members is usually much smaller and are more tightly organized than criminal organizations. Many groups have at most a few hundred members; some have only a few dozen, or less. The Islamic International Peacekeeping Brigade (IIPB) which is most prominent Chechen terrorist organizations had a membership of only 400 people in 2005, a year in which it was very active.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> "The Islamic International Peacekeeping Brigade", [www.tkb.org](http://www.tkb.org), 11 April 2005

## LOOSE NETWORKS

Terrorist groups based on loose networks have certain advantages over tightly controlled ones. Subgroups have the freedom to exploit local circumstances and targets of opportunity, which allows umbrella group leaders to encourage terrorist activity while at the same time disavowing responsibility for them.

"A haul of rocket launchers, plastic explosives and other weapons confiscated in Croatia was destined for renegade republican paramilitaries...."

World Briefing," New York Times, 29 July 2000.

Links among different terrorist groups and their state sponsors are often difficult to discern. Both groups have a strong interest in operating clandestinely. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact members provided direct and indirect support to anti-Western terrorist groups. A study in the early 1980s, in exploring the concept of state sponsorship of terrorism, carefully documented this relationship and maintained that the Soviet Union enjoyed control over many international terrorist organizations. The collapse of the communist insurgency in El Salvador following the demise of the USSR indicated that there were some instances in which Soviet control and support were vital. Others did less to support Claire Sterling's contention.<sup>14</sup>

Today, umbrella groups involving loose confederations of like-minded terrorist organizations supplement state sponsors. Religious leaders may issue general commands or fatwas, as did Osama bin Laden in February 1998. Osama bin Laden, in developing Al-Qaeda, included the Egyptian Islamic radical groups Al Jihad and Gamaat Islamiya as important allies and provided support for numerous other groups. With this organizational philosophy, Al Qaeda had created cells in more than 50 countries well before gaining worldwide notoriety through the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks.

From its first days, Al Qaeda invested heavily in training cadres. Its training camps in Afghanistan and Sudan prepared thousands of Islamic militants for revolutionary struggles in countries such as Algeria, Bosnia, Chechnya, Dagestan, Egypt, Kashmir, Lebanon, the Philippines, Russian, Somalia, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

There is no analogue in the world of international crime to bin Laden's network. Criminal groups occasionally coordinate their activities with one another, to be sure, but they are not driven by an overarching religious or political agenda.

## FRONT ORGANIZATIONS

Terrorist groups organize themselves along cellular lines to reduce their vulnerability to outside penetration. "To avoid detection they [terrorists] tend to be organized in cells of 3-5 persons, with only the leader knowing the real names of other cell leaders and their whereabouts." Criminal organizations use cellular structures for the same reason.

Both groups also use front organizations to advance their aims. According to Michael Sheehan, former US State Department Coordinator for Counterterrorism, "In many states where the government is weak in providing basic public health services, these groups [terrorists] create

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<sup>14</sup> Claire Sterling, *The Terror Network: The Secret War of International Terrorism*, Henry Holt & Co (March, 1981)

parallel public institutions, such as schools, public health services, and social networks." Criminal groups have engaged in similar maneuvers. Pablo Escobar helped build housing and soccer stadiums in poor areas and Al Qaeda has long boasted an extensive network for social service activities in target areas.

Criminal groups prefer to cover their illicit activities with legitimate businesses. This technique allows criminals to launder illicit profits, draws investment capital away from legitimate business enterprises, undermines respect for the rule of law, and makes it more difficult for legitimate authorities to stigmatize criminal behavior.

Semion Mogilevich, who operated out of Budapest, and was linked to financial fraud and trafficking in narcotics, arms, and prostitution is a good illustration of this. He has reportedly coordinated some of those activities with other Russian criminal groups and the Italian Camorra and established legitimate holdings into Hungary's arms business. His legitimate purchases include Magnex 2000, Digep General Machine Works, and Army Co-op.

German unification provided Russian mafias with a unique opportunity to acquire front organizations. In 1992, Berlin Police President Georg Schertz saw "a kind of gold rush by the various crime syndicates," and Berlin police established a "Russian Mafia" squad. A parliamentary inquiry in 1993 found "clear links between organised crimes in the drug trades, smuggling and prostitution and some firms set up by former east German communists."

## **MODUS OPERANDI**

Terrorists use a blend of old and new tactics to further their strategic aims. Assassinations, hijackings, and bombings remain staples. Exploiting modern technology, some groups have used video cameras for training and reconnaissance purposes, and computers to store files. Most terrorist groups have adapted quickly to the Internet, exploiting it as a tool to further their legitimacy as well as to recruit new members. In the future, the Internet will be an even more lucrative target for disruption and destruction as the global economy becomes increasingly dependent on Web commerce. A series of incidents in 2003 and 2004 served as reminders of how easily the international economy could be disrupted through cyber-terrorism.

So far, however, most international terrorist groups appear more inclined to exploit the Internet for propaganda rather than to destroy it. Most terrorist groups tend to have one (or more) sites on the Internet devoted to propaganda. Before September 11<sup>th</sup>, [www.Azzam.com](http://www.Azzam.com), an instrument of Al Qaeda, was a consistent window into much of the group's thinking. The Web page has supplemented, though not replaced hand-printed flyers and leaflets, which remain reliable, low-budget tools.

Of course, not every terrorist group seeks publicity. Some, such as the Greece-based Revolutionary Organization November 17, shroud themselves in secrecy. Moreover, it has become increasingly common for perpetrators not to claim credit for major terrorist attacks, as happened with the downing of TWA 800. While he was photographed enjoying television reports of the 2001 attacks on the US, Osama bin Laden did not claim credit for the actions until much later and, even then, in a rather indirect manner. Even groups that aggressively publicize their activities conceal their links with organized criminal groups, as those revelations would undermine the alleged purity of their cause(s).

Secure communication is a prerequisite for effective coordination among terrorists and their criminal counterparts. The Internet provides another potential avenue of communication between the groups. Both terrorists and criminals use web sites for communication, command, and control purposes.

## GROUP COMPETITION AND COOPERATION

Most terrorist groups seek to overthrow states. Some pro-state groups, however, seek to defend the existing political order. That difference has fueled fighting between terrorist groups with opposing ideologies, as has occurred in Northern Ireland, with Loyalist terrorist groups combating their Republican counterparts. This dynamic is also evident in Colombia, with paramilitary extremist groups such as the AUC fighting the FARC.



ETA Basque separatist July 29, 1995 bombing

International terrorist groups coordinate their activities for mutual gain. Recent reports of such activity abound. In Europe, the Basque Fatherland and Liberty (ETA) and Breton separatists have reportedly coordinated arms thefts in northern Spain. In the Middle East, evidence suggests arms trafficking between Hizballah and Hamas. In Asia, reports indicate the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and the New Peoples Army have coordinated local attacks in the Philippines. In Latin America, the Japanese Red Army personnel have trained elements of the FARC in Colombia. Sustained cooperation among terrorist groups appears less frequent, however, as it requires a high level of operational security and a convergence of operational goals.

Criminal groups also form ad hoc alliances and networks for mutual gain. Colombian traffickers have coordinated with Sicilian and Russian mafia groups; Mexican organizations have collaborated with their Colombian counterparts; and Nigerian gangs have worked with numerous foreign groups, making their country a major narcotics hub in Africa.

The same criminal groups have readily partnered with international terrorist organizations. In 2004 there were reports that a leading Al Qaeda operative, Adnan G. El Shukrijumah, had been Honduras attending a meeting with the leadership of an El Salvadorian gang known as MS-13. The gang has established extensive smuggling routes for bringing illegal aliens into the United States. For Shukrijumah, an alliance with this violent gang represents an important opportunity for penetrating the US borders in order to conduct attacks against domestic targets. In recent years other groups are known to have played key roles in supplying terrorist groups with the weapons needed for their attacks.<sup>15</sup>

But cooperation among criminal groups is only part of the story. Turf wars involving these groups have increased dramatically since the end of the Cold War as they struggle to establish proprietary niches. Criminal gangs have fought one another in major European cities, including Berlin and Warsaw. Russia has experienced the most severe gang-related violence, with gun battles in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Yekaterinburg, and Vladivostok. In St. Petersburg, for example, the Tambov and Kazan criminal gangs engaged in a bloody struggle for supremacy in the mid-1990s.

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<sup>15</sup> Jerry Seper, "Al Qaeda Seeks Tie to Local Gang", *The Washington Times*, 4 April 2004



Those violent dynamics reflect the opportunistic nature of international criminal groups. Unconstrained by political considerations, they have greater operational flexibility than their terrorist counterparts and are just as willing to fight one another as they are to collude for mutual gain.

## STATE SPONSORSHIP AND EXTERNAL SUPPORT

Some terrorist groups, such as the FARC and ELN in Colombia, are self-sustaining, thanks to their lucrative criminal dealings. Most other terrorist groups depend on external support to maintain their operations. State-sponsored assistance may include material support through weapons and ammunition or political and ideological assistance.



Tamil Elephant Pass Victory and Rising Day ("Eluchi Vizha") in Germany, June 17-18, 2000

Or it may depend on the financial largess of emigrant communities overseas. The LTTE, for example, relies heavily on expatriates in Canada. Similarly, the PKK has drawn heavily on financial support from Kurds throughout Western Europe.

During the Cold War, the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies routinely provided assistance to terrorist organizations that would otherwise have died for lack of material support. State-sponsorship continues today, though some of the players have changed. Outside support of terrorist groups operating in and around the FSU is now more common than in Latin America. Cuba's role in fomenting insurgencies in Latin America has diminished considerably during the last ten years. In contrast, Middle East groups have ratcheted up their support of Islamic terrorists operating in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the FSU.

In Russia, the line between institutional corruption and criminal gangs has blurred since the end of the Cold War. Some criminal groups have infiltrated the organs of state power, either through elections or appointments. This process, sometimes referred to as "legalization," provides criminals with a veneer of respectability.

## ADAPTIVE BEHAVIOR

Organizational longevity is a function of adaptability or, as noted above, organizational learning. The most durable terrorist groups are those that adjust to changing circumstances without jettisoning their ideological moorings. Both the PLO and Sinn Fein have moderated their public face without relinquishing their long-term goals. The challenge of adaptation confronted Hezbollah in southern Lebanon once Israel withdrew its forces from the buffer zone.

The failure to adjust has led to the demise of several terrorist groups. On April 20, 1998, a publication of the Red Army Faction (RAF) stated that "the urban guerilla battle of the RAF is now history." The report noted that "the attempt of the RAF to adapt itself to the 1990s was

unrealistic." East German sponsorship had helped the RAF adapt from one generation to the next. After the Cold War ended, radically changed international circumstances, the lack of state sponsorship, and member defections contributed to the group's demise.

In Peru, the Marxist-Leninist Tupac Amaru (MTRA) has faded into insignificance after its dramatic seizure of Japan's embassy in 1996. The government raid on the embassy resulted in the death of Nestor Cerpa, the MRTA's leader. The subsequent imprisonment of several other senior leaders and bitter infighting has effectively marginalized this group.

In contrast, many criminal groups in Latin American have proven themselves highly adaptable. Some have repeatedly demonstrated their ability to shift their transportation routes in response to shifting law enforcement strategies. Some Colombian narcotics traffickers, for example, reduced their reliance on Mexican smuggling routes and returned to Caribbean ones popular in the 1980's.

The Al Qaeda network has consistently demonstrated its adaptive capabilities since the United States and its allies launched a war against Islamic terrorism. In 2004 there were reports of an Al Qaeda "survival kit" that was prepared in order to help Al Qaeda operatives to survive on their own and how to communicate safely with their leadership. The instructions stressed decentralization, secrecy, and appeals to the religious sentiments of people with whom they live. There was specific guidance on how to use the Internet and cell phones without being detected as well as suggestions that they avoid frequenting the mosque on a regular basis. These instructions were based on the assumption that Al Qaeda and its affiliates are involved in what will be a long secret war against the Western nations.<sup>16</sup>

## **FUTURE OPERATIONS**

Certain dynamics of international terrorism have evolved along predictable trajectories-increased violence is one notable trend, for example. Terrorists have used weapons ranging from machetes to deadly toxins and biological agents but conventional bombings have been their most popular tactic.

Predicting the likelihood of a terrorist group's recourse to weapons of mass destruction poses a significant analytic challenge. Some terrorist groups appear more predisposed than others to inflict mass casualties. Japan's Aum Shinrikyo ("Supreme Truth"), a large terrorist group driven by an apocalyptic ideology, attempted several major attacks involving anthrax before turning to chemical weapons. They are unlikely to be the last. While they have not yet used them, Osama bin Laden's operatives trained to conduct attacks with toxic chemicals or biological agents.

So far, however, the ability of terrorist groups to inflict heavy casualties with conventional explosives helps explain the relative infrequency of biological, chemical, or radiological attacks. But this calculus is changing and apocalyptic and nihilist groups now seek more dramatic means of attacking civilized societies. The fact that Shinrikyo's bioterrorist strikes failed should provide little comfort. No doubt some groups will consider biological attacks too risky; others will attempt to learn from Shinrikyo's mistakes.

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<sup>16</sup> "Al Qaeda Preparing Followers for a Long Fight", *Dawn* (Karachi, Pakistan), 12 October 2004

Reports indicate Osama bin Laden attempted to purchase a nuclear warhead. The more likely danger involves attacks with radiological material. As one expert noted:

The danger of terrorist groups going fully nuclear is still considered small but the ability to encapsulate conventional explosives with radioactive materials like cesium-137 or cobalt-90 in order to contaminate seats of government or business centers for decades is already within some terrorist groups' capability, certainly if sponsored by a state which itself could construct such a semi-nuclear device.



Even before 2001, Osama bin Laden was known as "sponsor and financier of Sunni Islamic extremist causes."

So far, international criminal organizations have lacked powerful incentives to traffic in weapons of mass destruction, as other forms of illicit activity are more lucrative and less risky. That calculation may well change as Islamic terrorist groups are demonstrating that they can call upon significant financial resources. Should this happen, criminal groups will have access to well-established smuggling routes. Clearly, criminal groups have demonstrated a willingness to develop and market new products; crack cocaine and synthetic designer drugs, for example, reflects their desire for higher profit margins. These innovations reflect economic calculations, not moral concerns. Al Qaeda and its affiliates may well demonstrate that there is a profit in supporting international terrorism.

The most dangerous terrorist organizations are those such as Al Qaeda and Aum Shinrikyo because they combine extensive financial resources with an apocalyptic or nihilistic ideology. The ability of such groups to forge operational links with criminal groups has increased their potential reach and lethality.

## CONCLUSIONS

International terrorist groups and criminal organizations differ primarily in their motivation. Terrorists traffic in violence to maximize political power; criminals traffic in illicit goods and services to maximize profits. This distinction remains a useful starting point for analysis, even though it is sometimes difficult to ascertain the dominant motivation in practice.

International terrorist organizations can mutate into criminal gangs, as evident with various groups in Latin America and the FSU. Though criminal gangs may mutate into paramilitary organizations during periods of armed conflict, as happened with Arkan's Tigers in the former Yugoslavia, this happens less frequently.

Terrorist groups usually claim to act for "justice" on behalf of the people. Any admission or revelation that they had connections with criminal groups would be counterproductive. For their part, criminal groups naturally operate in the shadows, shunning publicity that might assist law enforcement officials. Terrorist-criminal links are thus often difficult to discern, as both groups have powerful incentives to conceal operational ties.

In theory, two conditions appear necessary for sustained high level terrorist-criminal coordination: the prospect of mutual gain and the ability to maintain operational secrecy. In practice, these

conditions are often difficult to achieve. High-level criminal-terrorist collusion thus appears less frequent than either cooperation among criminal groups or collaboration among terrorist organizations.

The evolving nature of terrorist-criminal links will depend on several wildcards. Inter-state war, famine, pestilence, or large-scale migrations may radically alter the future prospects for cooperation among these groups. Success of US stability operations in Iraq is one of the most important concerns in this regard. Additional factors are further instability in, or the outright disintegration of, major states infested with international criminal organizations, such as Colombia and Russia. Inter-state warfare can also affect the dynamics of terrorist and criminal activity.

Weak states and political disorder favor terrorist organizations and criminal groups, as demonstrated by the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Such turmoil makes it easier for unlawful elements to procure illicit arms and munitions, and smuggle them through porous borders.

Sudan provides an example of how terrorists can exploit conditions of chronic disorder. The country's weak central authority and seemingly endless civil war has provided an attractive sanctuary to numerous terrorist groups. These characteristics attracted Osama bin Laden to Sudan when he was forced to leave Saudi Arabia. By contrast, criminal groups generally prefer some semblance of state order; however, as such conditions befit their parasitic nature.

Terrorist-criminal links in FSU countries are a significant potential threat to U.S. security. Russia's bordering states remain a seething cauldron of economic instability, political turmoil, and religious fever. The region's relative proximity to the Middle East has important consequences, including the presence of Islamic fighters in the Caucasus region. Islamic terrorists also have struck targets in Latin America-e.g., the 1992 bombings of the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires and 1994 attack on the Argentine-Jewish Mutual Association-but overall they are far more active in FSU environs.

Russia will continue to possess thousands of nuclear weapons and an abundant supply of nuclear materials for the foreseeable future. This fact distinguishes it from all Latin America countries. Russia's stockpile of weapons-grade nuclear material adds up to about 1,000 tons of plutonium and highly enriched uranium, dispersed among more than 50 sites. Whether sting operations in Germany and elsewhere have inadvertently created a demand for fissile materials remains a hotly debated topic. Nonetheless, some of the more sophisticated criminal groups operating in the FSU appear well-positioned to traffic in nuclear materials, potentially in collusion with terrorist organizations.

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