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Migration, Transnational Crime and Terrorism: Exploring the Nexus in Europe and Southeast Asia

by Cameron Sumpter and Joseph Franco

Abstract

Theories of a crime-terror nexus are well established in the literature. Often conceptualised along a continuum, relationships between organisations range from contracting services and the appropriation of tactics, to complete mergers or even role changes. Recent irregular migrant movements have added to the nexus, providing financial opportunities to criminal enterprises and creating grievances and heated debate that has fuelled the anger of ideological groups. In Europe, terrorist organisations have worked with and sometimes emulated organised crime syndicates through involvement in the trafficking of drugs, people, weapons and antiquities. In Southeast Asia, conflict areas provide the backdrop for cross-border drug trafficking and kidnap-for-ransom activities, while extremist groups both commit crimes for profit and target criminals for recruitment.

Keywords: *Crime-Terror nexus, organised crime, terrorism, migration, Europe, Southeast Asia*

Introduction

Links between criminality and violent ideological groups have existed for decades. Hezbollah has been active in Latin America since the 1980s, when it began working with drug cartels to raise funds for operations and the purchase of arms.[1] The organised-crime-plagued Paraguayan city of Ciudad del Este near the border with Brazil and Argentina has long played host to Islamist groups such as the Egyptian al-Jama'at al-Islamiyya, Hamas and al-Qaeda, which have colluded with gangs to smuggle contraband, drugs and weapons, launder money and forge documents.[2] According to Brazilian intelligence, Osama bin Laden himself visited the notorious South American crime hub in 1995.[3] The so-called 'Golden Triangle' straddling the borders of Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand is considered the second-largest opium producing area in world, sustaining insurgency groups fighting the Myanmar government.[4] In maritime Southeast Asia, the Mindanao-based Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) gained notoriety through its kidnap-for-ransom (KFR) activities, receiving multi-million dollar payoffs.[5] Extremist organisations are continuing this crime-terror trend, both in terms of connections with the criminal underworld and independent illicit activities to raise capital for their own operations.

An added dynamic is the increased movement of migrants in recent years, particularly into Europe. The perilous journeys undertaken by refugees fleeing war zones and asylum seekers escaping repressive regimes have largely been dominated by criminal groups, which exploit human desperation for financial profit. When hundreds of thousands of people began pouring into Europe from the Middle East and North Africa in 2014, observers speculated that terrorist organisations may be working with human traffickers to smuggle operatives into the West. Commentators on the political right have embraced such claims yet a clear link remains unfounded. In Southeast Asia, motivations for movement are distinct. The tendency is for undocumented migrants to move from their poorly-governed places of origin to other poorly-governed spaces. This article will explore contemporary relationships between terrorist organisations, criminality and migration flows in Europe and Southeast Asia.

These diverse regions were selected for case studies as each has experienced a resurgence in violent extremism in recent years. Southeast Asia and Europe have both long struggled with organised transnational crime, which terrorist networks appear to be exploiting. Both regions have also experienced the strains of irregular migration, as asylum seekers escape conflict and political oppression.

Crime-Terror Nexus

In his seminal 1998 book, *Inside Terrorism*, Bruce Hoffman stated that it was “useful to distinguish terrorists from ordinary criminals”, who are driven purely by selfish motivation, usually seek material gain, and never intend to provoke a psychological reaction, send a political message, or influence public opinion through the criminal act.[6] In contrast, Phil Williams points out that terrorists have fundamentally religious or ideological goals, aiming to disrupt the status quo, manipulate political decision making, or overhaul existing governance structures.[7] Brian Phillips has also noted a “great chasm” between terrorists and criminals generally, owing to divergent motivations, though he identifies a fluidity which may blur conceptual lines with certain examples. [8] Bovenkerk and Abou Chakra stress that differences may also extend to the profiles of each: Criminals are generally from poorer socio-economic backgrounds, whereas those perpetrating political violence come from a variety of social classes, including wealthy, well-educated families.[9]

While a distinction may appear clear on the individual or micro level of analysis, macro (structural) and meso (group) perspectives suggest greater similarities and potential ground for confluence. One of the earliest and most cited works investigating relational dynamics between criminal and terrorist groups was from Tamara Makarenko, who conceptualised organisational links as a continuum.[10] Makarenko noted that the end of the Cold War resulted in a downturn in state sponsorship for terrorism, coinciding with the rise of transnational crime in the 1990s, which emerged as a means to fill the subsequent resource shortfall among a number of underground ideological groups.[11]

The *Crime-Terror Continuum* places organised crime on the left extreme with terrorism on the opposite. Moving towards the centre from either end there are strategic alliances between each type of group. An ideological group shifting further along the continuum will begin to employ criminal activities for operational purposes, such as bank robbery and kidnap for ransom in order to fund its activities. Conversely, an organised crime group may begin to converge by using terrorism for operational purposes; for example, the Italian Mafia has employed terror tactics in order to coerce the government into reducing pressure on its activities.[12] Criminal groups also tend to prosper in chaotic environments and stand to gain from political violence and the subsequent strains on a state’s security apparatus.[13] Though the opposite can also be true, as criminal organisations may seek to uphold the status quo rather than subverting political institutions if the existing climate is conducive to their activities.[14] At the centre of the continuum is complete convergence, involving either the evolution of a criminal group to prioritising political motivations, or that of an ideological organisation to deploy its political rhetoric simply as a front for criminal enterprise.[15]

In 2005, Louise Shelley and John Picarelli envisaged the relationship as a terror-crime interaction spectrum, which includes five phases:

1. Activity appropriation: Terror and criminal groups may imitate each other’s methods;
2. Nexus: Seeking efficiency, each group begins to outsource services such as forgery or bomb making, leading to business relationships;
3. Symbiotic Relationship: As a “natural progression” the groups then start collaborating more regularly and sharing goals and methods;
4. Hybrid Group: Next the two groups’ activities converge to the point where terrorism and organised crime reach equal footing and both become central to a group’s existence;
5. Transformation: In rare cases, a group may become so focused on the activities of the other that it drops its initial motivations completely and evolves into purely criminal or political. [16]

Shelley and Picarelli stress that this process is dynamic and many groups may not advance to a close relationship, much less to the hybrid or transformation stages. That said, in parts of the world where governance and rule of law is weak or non-existent, both may flourish and it can become “often difficult, not to say meaningless, to draw a distinction between” criminal groups and terrorist organisations.[17] Indeed, Chris Dishman asserts

that transformation through an evolution of interest is even more likely than sustained cooperation, given the essentially differing motivations.[18]

Despite Bruce Hoffman's differentiation between the intrinsic individual motivations of terrorists and criminals, there may be more similarities on the micro level when considering social and emotional drivers. Common themes in theories of radicalisation are the personal search for belonging, status, power and adventure among youth trying to find their way in life.[19] Young people becoming associated with gangs and organised criminal organisations are often driven by similar needs, seeking a robust identity and the physical and emotional sanctuary of in-group membership.[20] A further point of convergence between criminals and terrorists is the common adversaries of law enforcement and a state's intelligence community.[21]

The media, on the other hand, are considered differently by the two types of organisation. While criminals may seek to silence reporters through violence, terrorist organisations often view journalists as important conduits for relaying their messages and intentions to as wide an audience as possible.[22] Another variation regarding a third party is the way a state may respond to threats. Following a campaign of violence, a government may conceivably begin negotiations with a rebel insurgency that employs terrorist tactics, yet it is unlikely any such deals are pursued with a criminal organisation, at least openly in a democratic country.[23]

On a macro level, corruption is said to play a significant role in fomenting the success of both terrorist and criminal organisations, and the utility they perceive in working together.[24] Organised crime syndicates rely on corrupt officials to maintain business interests such as prostitution, drug trafficking and the cross-border smuggling of contraband and weapons. And in corrupt nations the world over judicial systems are undermined by the bribing of judges and prosecutors which provides various levels of impunity to well-resourced criminals.[25] This falls within the larger phenomenon of 'negative synergy' where illicit events and personnel produce a larger impact than they would if each acted separately.[26] What acts as the enabler for negative synergy between criminals and terrorists is money.[27]

The benefits of operating in corrupt states for terrorist organisations are two-fold. Militant Islamist groups highlight government corruption to seize the moral high ground in recruitment drives, portraying themselves as purer and more just than the '*taghut*' [false idol] state establishment. Yet at the same time, such organisations often profit from the smuggling routes and opportunities for monetary gain that backhanded transactions with venal authorities provide.[28] It may be no coincidence that Afghanistan, Libya, Yemen, Syria and Somalia – all countries which have endured sustained campaigns of terrorism in recent years – comprise five of the eight most corrupt nations in the world, according to Transparency International.[29]

The structural resemblance between current terrorist organisations and organised crime syndicates is "striking", according to Bovenkerk and Abou Chakra.[30] Traditionally stable hierarchical arrangements have now given way to more fluid group dynamics, which operate in small, loosely connected, autonomous units or cells.[31] Chris Dishman argues this evolution has provided opportunities for cooperation between criminal and terrorist organisations, and even long-term alliances.[32] Louise Shelley describes this evolution as emerging in the post-Cold War world, when nation-state power ceded a degree of authority to multinational corporations and multi-lateral international organisations.[33] Modern day criminal and terrorist networks "mirror the contemporary organizational structures of the licit world" according to Shelley, who contrasts the innovation and malleability of today's large tech companies with "old-fashioned corporations" of yesteryear, such as General Motors.[34] Developments in communication technologies have facilitated this strategic disintegration of formal structures, and provide opportunities for both terrorist and criminal organisations to advance their activities internationally while evading state security agencies, which are often hindered by jurisdictional boundaries.[35]

Crime-Terror Nexus in Europe

Events in Europe over the past few years have added weight to the assertion that various connections now exist between organised crime and terrorist networks. In a 2014 qualitative analysis of the crime-terror nexus in Europe, Makarenko and Mesquita found evidence of linkages in the European Union (EU) to consist largely of operational alliances and the appropriation of tactics.[36] They argue, however, that the nexus is at its most pronounced and collaborative in post-conflict regions of the world where state governance is weak and groups have merged or altered focus, such as the FARC's evolution into a drug cartel in Colombia. In stable Western democracies relationships are more opaque, but the gradual development of ties has increased the efficacy of both types of organisations.[37]

The most frequent linkage in the EU is the formation of alliances, either in the short-term as a “marriage of convenience” or for more sustained periods.[38] The 2004 Madrid train bombings which killed almost 200 people were largely funded by a “small, yet effective drug trafficking network” which imported hashish from Morocco and ecstasy from the Netherlands to be sold in Spain.[39] Drugs reportedly fund terror groups in other parts of the continent as well. Italy's counter-terrorism and organised crime Head Franco Roberti said in 2016 that IS and the Italian Mafia were working together to smuggle Moroccan-origin hashish from the Libyan coast into Southern Europe.[40] Contraband has also travelled in the opposite direction: in May 2017, an Italian couple with alleged ties to the infamous Camorra crime clan in Naples were arrested and charged with attempting to traffic Soviet-era weapons, including anti-tank and surface-to-air missiles to the Islamic State in Libya, as well as arms from a large arms cache to Iran.[41]

Links have been established for the trafficking of antiquities from the Middle East and North Africa into Europe. An investigation by the Turin-based newspaper *La Stampa* in 2016 found the Italian Mafia had been purchasing weapons from Moldova and the Ukraine, with help from the Russian Mafia, and transporting these from the southern Italian city of Calabria to the then IS-controlled Libyan city of Sirte.[42] In exchange for the weapons, IS would allegedly ship back artefacts seized from historic sites and tombs in Libya. The undercover journalist researching the story was offered to buy a Roman-era marble bust for €60,000.[43] Citing an unnamed French security official, the *Wall Street Journal* reported in August 2017 that IS makes roughly \$100 million per year from selling artefacts pilfered from Iraq and Syria.[44]

The second predominant crossover between terrorist groups and organised crime in Europe is the appropriation of tactics, which Makarenko & Mesquita consider to be an evolution of the alliance stage.[45] Whether to avoid differences in strategy and the possibility of betrayal by criminal groups or simply to secure more of the profits, terrorist organisations have increasingly been directing criminal operations themselves. According to the British newspaper *The Mirror*, IS was running an extensive series of lucrative cannabis farms in southern Albania in early 2016, which the group had commandeered after authorities pushed the local Mafia from the area in 2014. The jihadi outfit then began recruiting in the area – often from the ranks of organised crime as these men come equipped with desirable skill-sets.[46]

A recently intercepted operation suggests the Islamic State may also profit both from the commercial value of drugs and their stimulant effects. In November 2017, Italian police seized a large shipment of a synthetic opiate known as Tramadol in the port of Gioia Tauro, which would have commanded a street value of nearly €50 million.[47] Italian authorities stated the 24 million tablets, which had reportedly originated in India, were on their way to Libya where the Islamic State planned to sell them to its militants for €2 a pill, then use the profits to fund terrorist attacks.[48] Tramadol has come to be known as the “fighter's drug” and is widely used by militants in Libya and Egypt for recreation; it numbs the effects of physical exertion in battle.[49] Boko Haram fighters in the greater Lake Chad Basin region purportedly also favour this opioid-like painkiller.[50] Another drug popular among militant extremists is an amphetamine-based substance known as Captagon, which Islamic State defectors have claimed is given to IS fighters to keep them awake and alert.[51]

The increasing involvement and recruitment of individuals with criminal histories has been a notable dynamic of militant jihadism in Europe since the rise of IS in 2014. An October 2017 report from Rajan Basra and Peter Neumann noted that two-thirds of German foreign fighters who ended up in Syria and Iraq had criminal

records, with similar percentages from the Netherlands and Norway, while almost half of French jihadis were known to police.[52] IS has been highly successful in attracting petty criminals and hoodlums, either by offering them a “redemption narrative” where they can start fresh while joining a revolution, or through the erroneous framework that jihadism legitimises crime, as it is considered acceptable (even obligatory) to steal from non-believers.[53]

This was summed up well in 2016 by a senior Belgian counterterrorism official, who said: “Young Muslim men with a history of social and criminal delinquency are joining up with the Islamic State as part of a sort of ‘super-gang’”, which provides the romanticism of a perceived noble uprising and/or the allure of a well-armed, powerful criminal group.[54] A broader study conducted by the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR) found that many of the European jihadis interviewed continued to drink alcohol, take drugs and commit crimes even after committing themselves to the Islamic State.[55] Reportedly, Paris attacker Salah Abdeslam used to sit in his Molenbeek café watching ISIS videos “with a joint in one hand, and a beer in the other.”[56]

Migration-Crime-Terror Nexus in Europe

Organised criminal networks have long assisted with, and profited from, irregular and illegal migration into Europe. However, in recent years, the number of people escaping brutal conflict, repressive regimes and/or environmental degradation has surged, which has increased the profits of criminals, resulted in countless deaths, and polarised societies in receiving European nations.

According to a 2016 report jointly authored by Interpol and Europol, over 90% of migrants entering the EU are assisted by criminal organisations, however loosely constituted, and the migrant smuggling ‘industry’ into Europe was estimated to be worth \$ 5-6 billion in 2015.[57] A telling example is one outfit in Turkey which was charging \$1,200 per person for a perilous 25-kilometre journey from the Turkish city of Bodrum to the Greek Island of Kos in an inflatable dinghy crammed with 40 passengers. Each boat would net \$48,000, regardless of whether the voyagers survived.[58]

Given the fluctuating nature of irregular migrant flows, the criminal groups that facilitate travel are often small and adaptive, entering partnerships of mutual benefit with others in the illicit industry.[59] Sometimes alliances are based on family networks or more traditional cooperative operations. According to Libyan coastguard Col. Rida Benissa, Italian fishing boats lurked near the Libyan shore in 2015 to assist people smugglers heading north, and were facilitated by relationships between the Mafia and Libyan criminal groups based on the long-established trade of petroleum for whiskey.[60]

Terrorist organisations are also said to have profited from the movement of people. In May 2015, IS was reported to have made up to \$320 million through the exploitation of migrant movements from the Middle East and North Africa into Europe.[61] Within its so-called caliphate, the organisation was intent on keeping people from leaving either by force or through subtle strategies such as highlighting the dangers of refugee routes and the uncertainty of potential destinations.[62] [63] Yet outside the territory it directly controlled, fleeing refugees have been seen as a source of revenue. IS has reportedly exacerbated migrant flows by conducting attacks on civilians and refugee camps in Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt’s Sinai peninsula, which force people to escape and allow the terrorist organisation to profit from taxing the passage of vehicles or facilitating logistics.[64] Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) has similarly prospered on the plight of the desperate, demanding levies on migrant flows through North Africa.[65]

The connection between terrorist organisations and migration receiving the most attention, however, is the possibility that militant extremists have infiltrated refugee routes to smuggle themselves (back) into Europe. In late 2014, a widely cited BuzzFeed report quoted a Turkish people smuggler who claimed to have sent at least ten Islamic State fighters to Greece over the preceding few months.[66] Fears grew when two of the suicide bombers in the November 2015 Paris attack were found to have traveled into Europe among refugees through

Greece, and one was carrying a stolen Syrian passport when he died.[67] Former head of French intelligence Bernard Squarcini said at the time: “It is obvious now, amongst the migrants there are some terrorists.”[68] Six months later, INTERPOL and Europol warned of “an increased risk that foreign terrorist fighters may use the migratory flows to (re-)enter the EU.”[69]

Possibly the clearest link between migration, organised crime and terrorism can be found in the forged document industry, which the Islamic State appears to have both sought as a service and possibly emulated. A few weeks before the Paris attacks in late 2015, police in Brussels raided an inner-city apartment, uncovering a large-scale forgery operation which produced ID cards “of excellent quality” according to the arrest warrant. It was later revealed that at least three of the Paris attackers had used forgeries from this illegal outfit to evade authorities when crossing European borders.[70] The Algerian national at the heart of the illicit business was believed to be solely motivated by profit and was not charged with terrorism. However, French Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve claimed in early 2016 that the Islamic State had established its own “real fake document industry”, and around the same time former FBI Director James Comey revealed there was concern in the US intelligence community that the Islamic State had its own “capability to manufacture fraudulent passports”.[71]

Two-and-a-half years have now passed since the Paris attack and there is not significant evidence that terrorists have been smuggling themselves in large numbers into Europe to conduct attacks. In July 2016, a 21-year-old Syrian refugee killed a pregnant woman in Germany with a machete, though police described the man as “completely out of his mind” and found no apparent links to terrorist organisations.[72] In the same month, a 17-year-old asylum seeker from Afghanistan badly injured five people with an axe and a knife on a train in Germany before being shot dead by police. The Islamic State’s *Amaq* news agency claimed the assailant was one of its ‘soldiers’ and a Bavarian interior ministry spokesperson said it was “quite probable that this was an Islamist attack.”[73] Just over a year later, a teenaged Iraqi refugee (who had been living in the UK for two years) was charged with planting an explosive device on an underground train in London which injured 30 people.[74] These unsophisticated attacks perpetrated by asylum seekers hardly offer proof that trained jihadi militants have systematically infiltrated refugee routes into Europe, though the possibility cannot be ruled out.

The most dangerous outcome of the assertion that refugees pose a security risk to Western nations may be the polarising effect the issue has on democratic societies. Right wing media has seized upon any connection between migrants and violence, sometimes from dubious sources,[75] while left-leaning commentators often downplay potential threats.[76] In the United States, Donald Trump ran his election campaign on a platform of anxiety toward outsiders; in late 2017 the president eventually managed to implement a travel ban on people from several (mainly Muslim majority) countries.[77] Comparable xenophobia was present in the campaign leading up to the Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom.[78] And in Europe the influx of over one million refugees in 2016 alone energised far-right movements and increased popularity among nationalist political parties, such as Marie la Penn’s *Front National* in France, and Germany’s *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) party, which in October 2017 won seats in parliament, resulting in anti-fascist protesters flooding the streets of Berlin.[79]

In December 2017, thousands of white supremacists and far-right nationalists from different countries marched in Warsaw, Poland, with acerbic anti-immigration signs and hurling abuse directed at Muslims and Europe’s far left.[80] Groups at the extremes of the immigration debate in Europe, and the likelihood of each side further radicalising one another, potentially poses a greater threat to the continent’s stability than the dangers allegedly lurking within the refugee movements themselves.

Crime-Terror Nexus in Southeast Asia

Southeast Asia is no stranger to the crime-terrorism nexus. Violent extremist organisations have taken advantage of various poorly-governed spaces. In maritime Southeast Asia, the distinct geography presented by the shared borders of Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines has provided groups such as Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) with a conducive environment to launch attacks.[81] The five-month long Battle for the town of Marawi was a recent

demonstration of how terrorist organisations such as the IS-linked Maute Group (MG) and the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) were able to sustain themselves in the face of a major military offensive by assembling an illicit stockpile of weapons and other materiel. Similar to European examples of the crime-terrorism nexus, the relationship between the two phenomena can flow in either direction. Criminals also possess agency to employ terrorist behaviour to better achieve their goals. Both terrorists and criminals conduct their activities through pre-existing real world networks pre-dating the widespread proliferation of information and communications technologies (ICT).

Any discussion of the linkages between violent extremist organisations and criminal organisations often includes the 'Golden Triangle'. According to a recent UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) survey, the lawless area surrounding the borders of Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand constitute the world's second largest opium-producing region.[82] Specifically, 90 percent of opium produced in the Triangle comes from territory controlled by the Shan State Army – an insurgent group ostensibly waging a war to secure rights for the Shan minority from the Burmese majority.[83] The inflow of cash resulting from the opiate trade has led to the protraction of the conflict. But it is not only insurgents fighting the state who profit from the illicit opium trade. Since the late 1980s, Myanmar's military government has used the drug trade to acquire resources and raise counterinsurgent militia units.[84]

Unfortunately, the unfettered opium trade has also coincided with the industrial scale production of synthetic narcotics in Southeast Asia. Methamphetamine is reportedly being produced in 6 out of 10 ASEAN countries. [85] In the Philippines, it was apparent that ready availability of methamphetamines was not diminished by the anti-drug crusade promoted by President Rodrigo Duterte. Drug-related political violence in Mindanao increased six-fold in areas known to be hotbeds of jihadist activity.[86] Duterte's administration was quick to link the Battle for Marawi as a backlash against the reinvigorated anti-drug campaign, stating that the MG fuelled primarily by the drug trade.[87] But beyond Duterte's bombastic declarations, his government has failed to make the case that the MG had the sole distinction of being the only terrorist group linked to the drug trade.[88]

Rather than being the cause, the Maute's involvement in the drug trade was symptomatic of how terrorist groups would latch into any illicit fundraising activity to advance their cause. The ASG is an example of how a terrorist organisation could oscillate between ideologically-driven violence and profit-driven organised crime. Founded by Abdurajak Janjalani with seed funding from al-Qaeda, the ASG sought to replicate the tactics utilised by anti-Soviet mujahidin fighters.[89] The killing of Janjalani in 1995, led to the splintering of the ASG before its members built a coherent line of succession and developed a robust ideological stand. The ASG would achieve notoriety with the 2000 Sipadan Island kidnappings, receiving millions of dollars in exchange for the freedom of several Western European hostages. In the decade that followed, the ASG would degenerate into a criminal gang with only superficial references to the mujahidin discourse of Janjalani.[90]

Groups like the ASG do not exist in a vacuum. Un- and ill-governed spaces that act as the proving ground for both terrorist and criminal tactics are the result of distinct historical and socioeconomic circumstances. In maritime Southeast Asia, pre-colonial trade and the resultant emergence of piracy on the high seas were the precursors of the ASG's cross-border kidnapping sorties.[91] In the Golden Triangle, shared ethnicities act as the bridge for various factions involved in the drug trade.[92] Parallels between various ungoverned spaces in Southeast Asia see not only the convergence of extremist groups' motivations. Terrorist tactics disperse across disparate violent groups. In Southern Thailand, the various factions tied to the Malay Muslim insurgency aim for soft targets such as civil servants and teachers.[93] It is the same targeting mindset employed by the ASG in the remote provinces of Sulu and Basilan, to keep deployed military forces off balance.[94]

The appropriation of tactics is a natural progression from shared targeting preferences. The MG started as an extortion gang by Farhana Maute, a known political kingmaker in central Mindanao. After figuring in a political dispute, Farhana mobilised her armed kinsmen including her sons into the MG.[95] When the group first emerged, its use of IS imagery was an attempt to differentiate themselves from other private armed groups in central Mindanao.[96] In hindsight, it would appear that initial forays into jihadist propaganda and

discourse would mutate into actual linkages with IS.[97] However, it is too simplistic to ascribe the tactics used by the MG in the Battle for Marawi simply as a result of influence from the IS core. The use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in Mindanao stretch back to decades prior to the emergence of the MG. The earliest attacks of the ASG were based on fuel oil and fertiliser-based explosives, diverted from legitimate commercial and agricultural stockpiles. The same IED components and designs can be seen in communist insurgent-held areas in Eastern Mindanao.[98] It was the availability of possible explosive precursor materials that drove IED development. As expected, the know-how available for extremist groups moved to the criminal underworld. As early as 2008, reports have warned of a pool of mercenary “bombers-for-hire”, who have no qualms transferring their skills to any ideological group willing to pay.[99]

Gangsters or ‘*preman*’ have also been a feature of Indonesia’s jihadi movement for decades. In the late 1970s, a gang leader named Musa Warman with links to Islamist extremists led a series of robberies to support terrorist activities in the archipelago.[100] The use of *fa’i* (robbery of ‘non-Muslims’ to raise money for militancy) has continued sporadically ever since, contributing to operations such as the Bali bombing in 2002 which killed over 200 people,[101] and sustaining some of the small, semi-autonomous cells that became the norm in Indonesia after an effective police campaign to dismantle extremist networks during the 2000s.[102] In June 2018, police arrested five members of Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (the Indonesian umbrella organisation of IS supporters) who were allegedly planning to rob banks in the city of Blitar.[103]

Similar to recent recruitment drives in Europe, Jemaah Islamiyah leaders in Indonesia drew upon a ‘redemption narrative’ to attract new members since the late 1990s. Bali bomber Ali Ghufron (aka Muchlas) wrote in a treatise that jihad provided a way for delinquents and transgressors to repent, which opened up new channels for enlistment.[104] Significant numbers of *preman* committed violence under jihadi leadership during sectarian conflict in Central Sulawesi, which erupted following the fall of President Suharto in 1998. Prisons are also productive recruitment sites. Over 1,000 convicted terrorists have ended up in Indonesian penitentiaries over the past 15 years and ordinary criminals such as drug dealers have become vulnerable targets for radicalisation in prisons. According to the Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC), at least 18 Indonesians with criminal histories were involved in terrorism cases between 2010 and 2016, most of whom were radicalised in prison.[105] Jihadis in Indonesian prisons have often become potent gangs, with access to better food, services and conditions through outside support and the intimidation of guards. Such benefits, along with potential feelings of atonement, belonging and protection offer attractive incentives for regular criminal inmates to develop extremist convictions.

The symbiotic interaction between criminality and terrorism creates opportunities for illicit actors to straddle both communities. In mainland Southeast Asia, drug production and distribution are under the almost complete control of insurgent groups who occupy opium fields. In such scenarios, affiliation between terrorist and criminal groups does not merely overlap but constitutes an inseparable relationship. In maritime Southeast Asia, kidnapping as exemplified by the ASG is a “cottage industry” that employs entire communities.[106] One only needs to look at how the MG were able to amass fighters for the protracted Marawi siege as proof of how terrorism and crime are linked – both money and firearms were promised to youths willing to fight in Marawi. [107]

Polarisation and violence between migrant and native communities, as seen in European ghettos, follow a different dynamic in Southeast Asia. There is less emphasis on how state actors purportedly neglect minorities. In Southeast Asia, the crime-terrorism nexus foments a pervasive sense of lawlessness and insecurity. This leads to a vicious cycle that in turn further allows the entrenchment of criminal and terrorist activity.

Migration-Crime-Terror Nexus in Southeast Asia

Migration and its relationship to the crime-terrorism nexus is markedly different in Southeast Asia compared to the flows observed in Europe. The United Nations differentiates between four types of illicit flows: labour trafficking; human trafficking for sexual exploitation; the smuggling of migrants in the region to wealthy

countries in the West; and the smuggling of migrants from war-torn countries in South and Southeast Asia. [108] There is little evidence to suggest that human trafficking for sexual exploitation and the smuggling of Southeast Asians to the West is of consequence for the crime-terrorism nexus in the region.

Contestation over the status of Rohingya Muslims is the single greatest migration-related issue that could impact the trajectory of IS influence in Southeast Asia. Muslims from Rakhine State in western Myanmar have long faced discrimination and disenfranchisement from the Burmese majority. In 2012, latent communal tensions erupted into open conflict when the killing of a Buddhist woman sparked a series of riots in Rakhine. Southeast Asian nations, linked collectively through the ASEAN, have opted to ignore the issue.[109] The status quo was maintained up until 2015, when a surge in illegal migration composed of Bangladeshis and Rohingya ended up on the shores of Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and even Australia.[110]

The displacement and forced migration of the Rohingya caught the attention of both IS and AQ. The IS publication *Dabiq* has repeatedly expressed its intent to establish a base in Bangladesh from which to attack Myanmar government forces.[111] While IS may have limited operational capabilities in Bangladesh or Rakhine state, using the Rohingya issue is already a boon for its propaganda campaign in the face of dwindling content emanating from Syria and Iraq.

It was only a matter of time before the Rohingya situation would break from acting merely as propaganda fodder into actual violence. On 9 October 2016, Border Guard Police bases in Rakhine state were attacked by the Harakah al-Yaqin (HaY). It marked an escalation of the conflict and ushered in a renewed insurgent movement in Rakhine. What was distinct about the HaY is its Saudi-based Rohingya émigré leadership which commands trained Rohingya guerrilla fighters.[112] It is unclear whether the HaY, now known as the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), has actual links to IS. Its leadership has repeatedly denied any connections to other jihadist or transnational terror organisations.[113] With further violence and displacement stemming from a Myanmar massive and disproportional military crackdown which started in August 2017, it remains unlikely that the *raison d'être* for ARSA's existence will disappear.

A further connection between migration and terrorism in Southeast Asia involves Uighurs from Western China. In 2009, following inter-ethnic riots in the Xinjiang city of Urumqi, relatively limited numbers of Uighurs began seeking asylum in Southeast Asia.[114] A very small minority of these appear to have radicalised; some sought to travel to Syria, while a few individuals ended up in Indonesia.[115] In 2014, the head of the Indonesian jihadi forum *Jihad al-Busyro*, Arif Tuban, established WhatsApp communications with Salim Mubarak Attamimi, aka Abu Jandal, an Indonesian IS recruiter in Syria. On behalf of the beleaguered Santoso [Mujahidin Indonesia Timur (MIT) leader], Arif asked Abu Jandal for funding and manpower, which resulted in a small group of Uighurs being sent from Kuala Lumpur to Poso, four of whom were arrested en route.[116] It is not clear how many made the trip, but at least one allegedly traveled through Singapore and was subsequently sheltered by men on the Indonesian island of Batam, who were later implicated in the supposed 'rocket attack' plan on Marina Bay Sands.[117] An Indonesian police chief said in early 2016 that six Uighurs had made it to Central Sulawesi.[118] All are now thought to have been killed in the joint military-police operation Tinombala, which has all but obliterated Santoso's MIT. The Uighurs in Indonesia drew much attention and speculation, given concerns over the further internationalisation of regional terrorist organisations. However, it appears likely the men were not initially seeking war in the archipelago, but were diverted by handlers in Malaysia as they attempted to travel for hijrah or jihad to Syria. There have been no reports since of Uighur militants linking up with terror networks in Indonesia.

Conclusion

The Crime-Terrorism Nexus preceded the emergence of global jihadist groups such as IS. Any emerging violent extremist organisation would have to contend with the challenge of amassing illicit resources to sustain its operations. Converging motivations between terrorists and criminals should be expected. The greatest challenge for law enforcement and security services is keeping up with the technical means that illicit actors

and groups can use. Exponential growth in digital transactions and the emergence of non-traditional financial mechanisms such as cryptocurrencies will complicate measures to prevent the transfer of illicit resources. Encryption and the proliferation of non-public, peer-to-peer communication apps via the internet also make surveillance by security services more difficult.

Current irregular migration flows confound the picture. Facilitated by transnational criminal groups, asylum seekers entering Europe are branded security threats by increasingly significant populist politicians of the societies accepting them. Potentially dangerous social movements and far-right political parties have prospered. While there is little evidence of radicalism among the new arrivals, Islamophobic sentiment in host nations may well form grievances that initiate pathways to extremism. Southeast Asia has not experienced such frictions, but the plight of Muslim refugees – whether they be fleeing Myanmar or moving towards Europe – has provided effective propaganda material for those organisations intent on stoking anger and inspiring violence.

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