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## Global terrorism and organised crime: Convergence and general security implications

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### **Abstract**

*This paper's interest is in interrogating the extent to which global terrorism and organised criminality do converge. In spite of the basic differences between them in terms of motivations and methods, historical examples have indicated that terrorism and organized crime do converge in several ways. Indeed, some analysts think that both threats can no longer be studied in isolation. Thus, this paper seeks to explore the hypothesis of a crime-terror nexus. Three types of convergence are examined: involvement in criminal activities by terrorists, transformation of terrorists groups into hybrid or purely criminal organizations and cooperation between organized criminal organizations and terrorist groups. Finally, the paper made allusions to the cases of Boko Haram and Fulani Herdsmen, presented as examples of privileged scenarios for interaction between global terrorism and organized crime. As a theoretical paper, it does not set itself to establish a wholly new subject but to contribute to the debate that has been gaining interest in recent times.*

**Keywords:** Global terrorism, Organized crime, Convergence, Terrorism-organized crime

### **Introduction**

Generally speaking, two lines are said to converge when their courses interchange or they meet at one point. This can be said of terrorism and crime activities; because their paths interchange at one point eventually. According to Laqueur (1999) scholars prior to this time, have maintained a sharp distinction between global terrorism and organised crime. However, with the passing of time the distinction has become increasingly blurred. In recent years, the change in perspective has gone so far that some experts suggest the necessity of doing away with this distinction, at least because of certain instances of a clear symbiosis between one phenomenon and the other. Some of the information and reports provided by the mass media tend to reinforce this new tendency, whether by means of news reports that assure us the involvement of terrorist groups

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and organisations in typical activities of common or organised crime, or by attributing characteristics of an unquestionably Mafioso nature to others.

In short, the opinion has started to spread that the convergence between terrorism and organised crime could come to be a growing trend within the geo-political framework inaugurated at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Makarenko, 2004). There are various factors responsible for this change of paradigm or opinion. Very prominent is the end of the Cold War and the proliferation of anti-terrorist laws that have drastically reduced the willingness of States to sponsor terrorist groups or organisations, inducing them to use other means of financing (including those relating to conducting illegal activities). Of equal importance is the transition towards a globalized economy and world system and the consequent emergence of a transnational form of organized criminality, which has increased the possibilities of terrorists becoming involved in illegal businesses (Sanderson, 2004).

### **Some Preliminary Conceptual Clarifications**

Two concepts should occupy our attention here and these are ‘terrorism’ and ‘organised crime or criminality.’ Conventionally speaking, the terms “terrorism” and “organised criminality” are the name given to activities that are partly similar and partly different. The similarity lies in their relationship with illegal and “organised” activities carried out by a set of individuals or a group but with a minimal degree of structure. Of equal importance is their penchant and tendency for violence. These two similarities explain why some penal codes define terrorism as a sub-type of organised criminality but which can be distinguished from the general type of other criminal activities in two essential aspects. First is the use of armed violence and violent activities aimed at instilling fear in the general populace, and an association of such practices for a political end. .

Given these significant differences, de La Corte and Gimenez-Salinas (2011) viewed the concept of “organised criminality” to be those criminal phenomena that, in addition to being attributed to collective or organised individuals, have the unique or main objective of obtaining and accumulating economic or material benefits. This definition implies that organized crime is run by a greed motif and hence, seeks for economic gains for the particular criminal organisation. The wide range of illegal activities, which such criminal organisations involve themselves give

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them such opportunity. Their illegal activities range from illegal trade of all types, extortionate practices, robberies, attacks and (paid) killings, labour and sexual exploitation, frauds and swindles, unlawful financial services, etc. These illegal activities are also complemented by other acts that are not always directly remunerated but are seen as services to their 'clients' such as acts of violence and money laundering.

Although Abadinsky (2010) has reported that attempts to define organized crime have not always met with consensus by scholars, even a review of the subject in law enforcement and academic literature equally reveal this difficulty (Loree 2002). However, Cressey (1969, p. 319) has presented a definition, which for many decades was accepted and adopted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). He sees an organized crime as;

any crime committed by a person occupying, in an established division of labour, a position designed for the commission of crimes providing that such division of labour includes at least one position for a corrupter, one position for a corruptee, and one position for an enforcer.

Currently, the FBI defines organized crime as;

Any group having some manner of a formalized structure and whose Primary objective is to obtain money through illegal activities. Such groups maintain their position through the use of actual or threatened violence, corrupt public officials, graft or extortion, and generally have a significant impact on the people in their locales, region or the country as a whole.

The United Nations (2000) has acclaimed as organized criminal group;

Any structural group of three or more persons existing for a period of time and acting in concert with the aim of committing one or more serious crimes or offences ... in order to obtain, directly, or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit.

However, as Giraldo and Trinkunas (2013) noted, the term 'organised crime' originally, was used to refer to hierarchical crime groups that monopolized the criminal market in a given area; to deploy violence and corruption systematically in pursuit of their illicit activities; making abnormally high level of profit that allowed them to threaten political and economic structures of the state. This conception sees systemic violence and corruption as the very essence of organised criminal organization.

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In turn, the term “terrorism” tends to designate a particular type of violent activity: although, by extension, it is frequently used to refer to those individuals, groups and organisations that systematically practice it. However, as Sinai (2010/2011, p. 2) noted, the most fundamental starting point in terrorism studies is to how to define it. This been the case does not mean that its definition is that simple or generally agreed to by scholars and professional institutions whose responsibilities are to counter or curb it. Many of the definitions have over-simplified it by neglecting many critical variables such as the activities that do not include violence, but nevertheless, enhance and support terrorism by mobilizing support for it within the radical subculture, providing social welfare services and even maintaining and providing internet services for such groups. In addition, part of the problematic in defining terrorism is the consideration whether it should include attacks on only ‘noncombatant’ targets or not, whether it is a tactic of warfare used by subnational groups against all citizens of a state irrespective of whether they are civilians or military or attacks solely on ‘armed’ military.

If the definition of terrorism is limited to only attacks on noncombatant groups then attacks on armed military targets and combatants should not be included as it then qualifies as guerrilla warfare. The difference between these two groups being that while guerrilla groups use a combination of military and political methods to overthrow the government of a state, terrorist groups, on the other hand, aim to provoke a government’s response to their operations which take place off the battlefield. In preference for this distinction, Ganor (2005, p. 17) defined terrorism as “a form of violent struggle in which violence is deliberately used against civilian in order to achieve political goals (nationalistic, socioeconomic, ideological, religious etc).” Ganor explained that the use of ‘deliberate’ in targeting of civilians in order to achieve political objectives is what distinguishes a terrorist act from a purely guerrilla warfare where military targets are the major focus of their operations.

On the other hand, Sederberg (2003) suggested that terrorism can be viewed from three perspectives. The first perspective is to see it in the context of a war, that is, as an enemy to be defeated in war. This analogy presumes the use of military means and methods in combating terrorism. The second is from the perspective of normal police techniques and procedures. This analogy has two very important implications; the first suggests that like crime, terrorism will

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disappear once contained, and secondly, this suggests a reactive response. Criminals are often apprehended or caught not always before but usually after the commission of the crime. Finally, the third perspective is to consider terrorism as a sort of disease, a social malaise for which a cure must be found. Scholarly disposition to this perspective sees terrorism from the prisms of symptoms and causes. The assumption of this perspective is that there is need for the identification and adoption of long term strategies that address the basic causes of terrorism and hence its solution will evolve from analyzing the symptoms and causes. Although not mutually exclusive, these three perspectives represent the dominant ways terrorism is viewed by either scholars or professional institutions responsible for curbing it.

Thus, for any definition of terrorism to be acceptable, it must, at least, include these six major elements;

- (1) the use of violence or threat of violence,
- (2) the existence of an organized group,
- (3) the intention of achieving a political objective,
- (4) the focus of violence must be a targeted audience that extends beyond the immediate victims who are often innocent civilians (usually account for as collateral damage),
- (5) in this case, government can be either the perpetrator or the target, and finally,
- (6) it is a form of insurgency usually favoured by the weak (Lutz and Lutz 2008, p. 9).

Hence, to remedy these problems, Sinai (2010/2011, p. 3) proposed this definition, that;

Terrorism is a tactic of warfare involving premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated by subnational groups or clandestine agents against any citizen of a state, whether civilian or military, to influence, coerce, and if possible, cause mass casualties and physical destruction upon their targets. Unlike guerrilla forces, terrorist groups are less capable of overthrowing their adversaries' government than of inflicting discriminate or indiscriminate destruction that they hope will coerce them to change policy.

It is important to note that, irrespective of any definition accepted, terrorism always involves three basic components; the perpetrator, the victim, and the target of the violence. As Badey (2010/2011, p.1) explained, the perpetrator commits the violence against the victim. The victim is used to communicate with or send a message to the intended target. The target is expected to

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respond to the perpetrator. Fear is used as a catalyst to enhance the communication and elicit the desired response. So what distinguishes acts of terrorism from other types of violent action is their capacity to provoke an intense social or psychological impact (anxiety or fear) that is disproportionate with respect to the physical damage caused to the people or objects chosen as targets of the aggression.

### Areas of Convergence/Interactions

In the recent decades, organised criminality has undergone an intense process of transnationalisation resulting from three events/factors. The first is a substantial increase in cooperation between criminal groups and organisations that are not even in spatial proximity to each other. The second is the emergence of various unlawful global markets, with some business stages distributed in different regions of the world (the best example is provided by the worldwide trade in drugs); and the third is the appearance of criminal organisations with an active presence or implementation on an international scale (UNODC (2010)). However, three forms or types of convergence can be identified.

The first and perhaps the most common mode of convergence is what de la Corte (2013, p. 358) has called “convergence by appropriation of methods,” which portrait instances of when terrorist groups are involved in acts that are typical of organized crime groups and share similar intentions of financing their operations. A number of such activities can be identified as;

- I. Drug Trafficking: Either on a large or small scale, both criminals and terrorists have been known to indulge in the trafficking or use of drugs. According to Lewis (2003), the term, ‘assassin’ actually came from the Arabic word *hashishim*, meaning ‘users of hashish.’ The convergence here is the possible assistance offered by professional drug traffickers in procuring these drugs.
- II. Illegal Trading Activities: According to Picarelli and Shelley (2007, p. 44), Al Qaeda had made use of the black market to sell gold and diamonds to fund its operations and those of its numerous cells in other parts of the globe such as the Boko Haram in Nigeria. Of equal note, is the AQIM, which is noted for involving in the smuggling and illegal sale of cigarettes.

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- III. Theft and Armed Banditry: The level and instances of armed banditry on Nigerian roads have escalated with the involvement of herdsmen and the terrorist group of Boko Haram. Although, there is little evidence to show whether they are involved in bank robberies, however, enough evidence is available to show that sister terrorist organizations like the Yemaa Islamiyya (the most powerful terrorist group in south-east Asia) and the Pakistani Taliban have constantly funded and replenish their war chest from money got from thefts and robberies of banks (del Cid Gomez 2010).
- IV. Forgery and Forging of Documents: Granted the expanse of ungoverned spaces available in Nigeria and neighbouring Sahel region countries, with uncharted and illegal border-land between them, this may not be an important issue because of the ease of movement across borders. However, this activity becomes one of the chief logistical needs of terrorist groups which professional criminal forgers can meet. A significant number of terrorists have entered into America and Europe using forged travelling documents, passports and credit cards (Sageman 2004).
- V. Kidnappings: In Nigeria, following in the wake of the Niger Delta militants, the Boko Haram terrorist group has raised this criminal activity to a level, hitherto, unseen or experienced. Globally, this has become the fastest and perhaps the surest way to acquire funds for criminals and jihadists. Kidnapping has therefore become a recurring mode of financing generally associated with terrorist groups globally (Agara, 2020, Ogabido 2019).
- VI. Extortion for Protection: This criminal activity is as old as crime itself. The use of intimidation, aggression and threats for extorting money from traders, villagers, businessmen and professionals has become a general practice among terrorist groups in their locale of operation (Agha, 2012). It exemplifies a convergence in the modus operandi of criminals and terrorists.
- VII. Creation of Front or Screen Companies to Launder Money: This is at a high level of sophistication that allows for creation of dummy companies to launder and legitimize money or funds got from illegal means and sources. While, we may argue that the Nigerian terrain may not be so sophisticated, we cannot rule out the possibility of sympathizers who may assist terrorist groups in this regard. In more



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developed crimes and societies, examples of this type of financing are numerous (Passas and Gimenez-Salinas, 2007, pp. 493-521).

- VIII. Other Misdemeanours: This include cyber-crime, internet frauds and operation of illegal websites for purposes of recruiting, planning attacks and sharing of information (Seib 2010/2011, Weimann 2006).

The second area of commonality or convergence is through a form of hybrid transformation of terrorist group into purely criminal organization. This occurs when the involvement of the former in illegal businesses and operations as listed above, although the list cannot be said to be exhaustive, becomes quite lucrative and productive with little or no effective interference from the police or other law enforcement agencies. The result is a form of hybrid transformation that sees terrorism takes on the economic characteristic reminiscence of criminal organizations, with particular tendency towards accumulating economic profits rather than pursuing its primary political or religious goals. This was the case with the Delta militants and the various ethnic militant groups that emerged, ostensibly to fight for their ethnic group emancipation. The political goal soon became a façade under which economic profits were accumulated and appropriated for personal enrichment. The cases of some of the leaders of these groups living in opulence and garnering government's contracts for themselves with no visible change in the lives and lifestyles of the people they professed to be fighting for, is a justification of this point.

In the case of religious terrorist groups such as the Boko Haram, the same can be said of it. The fact that they still professed on spreading Islamic tenets and achieving an Islamic state does not rule out the fact that certain individuals within the leadership rank may be inclined towards personal accumulation and enrichment. As Wannenburg (2003, pp. 77-90) has confirmed in the case of the Philippine Islamic terrorist leader, Abu Sayyaf, who initiated a new phase of the jihad that concentrated more on kidnapping, drug trafficking and extortion on assuming leadership after the death of the former leader, Abdurajak Janjalani in 1998. This has made analysts to regard it as a hybrid blending of criminality with religious fervor since its religious goal and policy of Islamisation has not been publicly renounced. Same then can be said of the Boko Haram terrorist group in Nigeria.

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The third, but not the least most popular form of convergence is direct cooperation with criminal groups or elements. This can take place at two levels. First is where an organized criminal organization shares similar religious ideology and beliefs with a terrorist group. Usually, this is caused by the radicalization of such criminal groups or by the deliberate targeting of people of similar religious belief as the criminal organization. The cooperation between these two elements can usually take the form of joint participation or collaboration in ventures or attacks on the society or government's installations. Hence, shared religious affinity or belief with sense of victimization or marginalization may force or compel this collaboration.

The second form of collaboration comes purely from an economic incentive or practical need that pays both parties. Hence, this collaboration becomes consensual and takes the form of offering services for which one of them is lacking in ability or personnel while the other has such personnel who can render the services thus required. Instances of this type of collaborations include procuring weapons, explosives, or false travelling documents from criminal organizations by terrorist groups whose ability and competence do not extend to these area of operations. There are substantiated reports of such collaborations between Al Qaeda and certain Russian and Eastern European criminal organizations (Wannenburg, 2003).

### **Security Consequences of Convergence**

The coincidence of criminal and terrorist organizations collaborating and operating within the same area or state can only worsen the security situation of their country. It would eventually cause harm to the economies of such areas, creating instances of political disturbances, raising security costs for local businesses, generating security risks for investments and investors and even halting the possibilities for economic growth and development (Agara, 2016). The substantial economic resources siphoned off by the terrorist and organized crime groups denied the country of huge resources that could be diverted into development, thereby, exacerbating political agitations because of non-development of major infrastructures. This has also aggravated political dissonance and agitations among groups within the society. The destabilizing impact of this has further led to deepening the problem of governability, depleting the possibility of law enforcement and removing obstacles from effectively curbing the activities

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of these groups. This failure creates a vacuum which they are quick to take advantage of by heightening the rates and volume of their activities.

The increased transnational flow of people, goods and money which are now greatly facilitated by advances in communication and transportation technologies enabled by globalization has further worsened consequences for global security. The ease of, and increase in cross-border traffic has given opportunities for criminals to hide their illegal businesses within the flow of legal commerce. Of high risk for security is the fact that globalization has increased the importance of 'network' form of organizations for both legal and illegal enterprises. Organizations can now do away with the traditional hierarchical structure and recruitment of staff with the full range of specialised skills as these specialized skills can be contracted out. Among criminal and terrorist groups, this enhances their operations as groups can converge and be disbanded after every operation.

At a more specific level, the convergence of the criminal activities of these two in many cases has led to high level of transnational crime which most often, translate to national security threat requiring a quantitatively and qualitatively different response from governments. For instance, the ability of these organizations to provide new avenues for illicit transportation of goods and persons challenges the state's ability to exercise its core function as the guarantor of national sovereignty and the holder of the monopoly over use of force and provider of common goods for the citizenry. When these responsibilities are carried out by other sub-national actors apart from the state, its effectiveness and power with the security of the state is thereby challenged. Citizens, seeing that these essential services can be provided by other sources, withdraw their loyalty and dependence on the state and hence the state's continued legitimacy is put in question.

Second, the level of transnational crime occasioned by this convergence may become a fundamental threat to security through its potential to corrupt or coerce government officials. In the case of Nigeria, the power of criminal-terrorist convergence has led to a hybrid form of governance in which politicians, law enforcement and these criminal-terrorist organizations has formed mutually supporting networks. Personnel of the armed forces, local chiefs and local governments chairmen have been found and identified as possible collaborators of marauding

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Fulani herdsmen, Boko Haram sympathizers and supporters of Delta militants' organizations. Third, this convergence is a security threat to the extent to which it undermines democratic stability and legitimacy of the government itself. The perceived reluctance and fecklessness demonstrated recklessly by law enforcement, especially, when it comes to dealing with the atrocities of the Fulani herdsmen in comparison with the quickness and dispatch with which government is dealing with the Niger Delta militants and even the Boko Haram insurgents, is undermining public confidence, trust and loyalty to the regime.

Finally, the threat posed by this phenomenon to economic development cannot be denied. Not only does it call to question the rule of law, but also deters foreign investment by increasing the level of insecurity for both personnel and the investments. In addition, it must be noted that criminal enterprises are formed to reinvest their proceeds as part of its money-laundering efforts. These criminally affiliated business organisations often have unfair advantages over legitimate ones because they often operate by compromising legal laws and have unfair advantage through their access to cheap capital. Through their owners, they can also intimidate legal business ventures in same market with them.

## **Conclusion**

We must acknowledge the fact that the criminal-terrorist nexus which constitutes the narrative of this paper has been disproved as been extreme. For instance, as the US State Department has emphasized, whereas the two groups may share similar 'methods,' they definitely do not share the same 'motives,' and this puts a limit to the level of their possible collaborations. While yielding grounds on the possibility of tactical collaboration between these two, particularly where one of them controls an essential territory or resources, they have, however, argued that in a situation where criminal organizations are strong, there is a high likelihood that they will resist such collaboration especially where it will draw the attention of law enforcement agencies to them.

The above counterpoint, notwithstanding, the possibility is higher, particularly, in developing states with a lot of ungoverned spaces, that a convergence of criminals and terrorists interest in

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money making may further destabilize an already fragile state system. In fact, the multiplier effect of such cooperation and convergence of intentions will be very devastating. Nigeria is currently experiencing it. We further aver that the apolitical motive of criminal organizations and the political motive of the terrorist group will eventually have a common meeting point (a convergence) in the area of economic or profit motive. We take it as a fact of reality that terrorist groups have long relied on and adopted criminal means such as bank robbery, extortion and kidnapping, as sources for funding their enterprises. In fact, the same democratizing effects of globalization that increased opportunities for licit organizations to become rich also offer similar opportunities for illicit organizations to become rich and fund their illegal activities. This opportunity extends to enhancing cooperation between criminal and terrorist groups in areas of services which, perhaps, only criminal groups can offer such as buying weapons from arms traffickers or obtaining false identity documents from counterfeiters.

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