

“At the Edges of Terror: An Assessment of the Role of Lone Wolf Terrorists, Terrorist Group Participants and Organised Criminals in Contemporary Terrorism” Martin J. Gallagher, University of Lancaster and serving Chief Inspector, Police Scotland

A PhD by Publication combining articles that have featured in Terrorism and Political Violence, Perspectives on Terrorism, the Journal of International Security and on the website of the International Centre for Counter Terrorism – The Hague, to produce an enhanced understanding of contemporary organised crime and terrorism. The work involved in the thesis has received coverage from The Sunday Times, the BBC, Jane’s Intelligence Review and even The Sun.

This thesis utilises the concept of the ‘crime-terror nexus’, established in academic circles which attempts to illustrate and explain the relationship between those involved in organised crime groups (OCGs) and those participating in terrorism or political violence. Where it differs from past work is that this research focusses on individual actors rather than previous consideration that has focussed almost exclusively on cohesive ‘groups’. The fluid nature of allegiances, particularly in OCGs, makes this new approach very useful in rethinking the ‘why’ of both organised criminal and terrorists actions.

INDIVIDUAL

Attitude to risk, personal identification with the particular terrorist cause, any controlling ‘red lines’

REPUTATION

Does the relationship have a positive or negative affect on the OCGs standing amongst criminal peers and ‘relevant wider society’

**Factors Crucial to a Crime/
Terror Nexus Relationship**

Individual

Reputation

Distance

Profit

Co-operation

Incarceration

PROFIT

How much the OCG is dependent on the initial nexus relationship to continue its funding.

DISTANCE

How closely the terrorist group acts to the location of the OCG and their wider ‘society’.

CO-OPERATION

The extent the relationship impacts upon the ongoing operations of the OCG through specialist support or expertise.

INCARCERATION

The positive (or negative) impact of interactions occurring through shared incarceration and/or the impact of incarceration of key participants.

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My thesis utilises the concept of the ‘crime-terror nexus’, established in academic circles which attempts to illustrate and explain the relationship between those involved in organised crime and those participating in terrorism or political violence. Where it differs from the past is that my research focusses on individual actors rather than previous work that has considered only cohesive ‘groups’. The fluid nature of allegiances, particularly in organised crime groups, makes this new approach very useful in rethinking the ‘why’ of both organised criminal and terrorists actions.

Through focussed research, case studies, and an expanding modelling concept I demonstrate that the antecedents, actions and attributes of contemporary lone wolf terrorists and participants in crime/ terror nexus relationships have significant similarities. This thesis uniquely examined the crime/terror nexus and lone wolves set within established academic frameworks demonstrating the cyclical nature of terrorism. In doing so it draws out previously unacknowledged common factors across what, until now, appear wholly disparate terrorist campaigns. There is considerable focus on organised crime in relation to both Northern Irish related terrorism and the Islamic State. The opinions of senior officers and relevant front line practiconers were gathered through interviews and focus groups to provide the perspective of those with first-hand knowledge of organised criminals and terrorists.

My thesis contends that by better understanding the criminal behaviours of modern terrorists who often appear to have a religious motivation, we can see through this façade and appreciate we have actually moved into an age of what can be best termed a form of ‘identity terrorism’. The reappraisal undertaken in this thesis, placing a variety of actors under scrutiny from a new perspective, clearly shows that the crest of the religious wave of terrorism may have passed, and instead appears to have moved into new uncharted waters where the actions of those involved in organised crime are of significant import.

While it is acknowledged within the thesis that it would be impossible to capture all the idiosyncrasies of an organised criminal’s decision making process, modelling that is developed through the research seeks to illustrate the main internal and external factors that will influence their decisions when undertaking and maintaining ‘high tariff’ relationships, such as engagement with terrorist groups.

External Factors

The main External Factors identified that will affect the ongoing relationship are:

- Increased/ Decreased Law Enforcement Interest – The level of law enforcement activity will be directly commensurate to the actions those participating in the relationship can undertake without potential and/or actual interdiction or arrest.

- Media Interest – The amount of media interest will impact on the ability of the relationship participants to carry out mutually beneficial activities without public knowledge.
- Deception – The degree to which either party having been misled in respect of the true nature of a relationship will have a bearing on the degree to which they cooperate and discovery of the deception will have a direct impact on continuing trust.
- Changing World Events – From the man made to the natural (such as earthquakes, tsunamis and disease) calamitous world events may prove disastrous or advantageous to a relationship.

These external factors will combine to affect the decision-making process of the organised criminal.

For the organised crime group themselves the following Internal Factors are of relevance:

Internal Factors

- Individual – The psychological makeup of the participants in the organised crime group or in a strictly controlled group, and those of its leader, will have a direct bearing on the relationship. The attitude to risk, personal identification with the particular terrorist cause, any controlling ‘red lines’ on behaviour and an individual desire for cultural and/or widespread notoriety (or perceived adulation) will all be determining factors.
- Reputation – The degree to which knowledge of the initial nexus relationship has a positive or negative affect on the Organised Crime Groups standing amongst criminal peers and ‘relevant wider society’.
- Distance – How closely the terrorist group acts to the location of the organised crime group and their wider ‘society’ will be of direct relevance to all relationship calculations.
- Profit – The degree to which the organised crime group is dependent on the relationship to continue its funding and any alternative revenue streams that are available as a contingency if the relationship is discontinued will be relevant.
- Co-operation - The extent to which the relationship impacts upon the organised crime groups operations, through for instance security of commodity routes or expert knowledge of explosives, will require to be considered.
- Incarceration – the positive (or negative) impact of interactions occurring through shared incarceration, or the impact on the relationship arising through the incarceration of key participants.

Combined these internal and external factors form a balance sheet of competing considerations from which the organised criminal contemplating entering or maintaining an initial nexus relationship with a terrorist group will consider.

The thesis acknowledges that this model is not exhaustive but shows from the research to date that contemplation of such a relationship does not amount to a purely **profit** based calculation in **financial terms**. For the organised criminal monetary gain may indeed be the driving factor, but it is far from the only consideration.

The modelling system utilised within the research expands to demonstrate the role conflict (such as that in Syria) has on organised crime participants, and the potential outcomes of this.

The thesis concludes that the newly identified commonalities amongst actors present opportunities for law enforcement and counter terrorism professionals to reconsider the partitioned approach to dealing with adherents to what appear radically different ideologies and motivations, and instead focus on the individuals espousing their allegiance. The research suggests looking for more macro counter measures targeted on the prevalent characteristics amongst participants rather than tackling the apparently all important group narrative of each contemporary terrorist campaign, with a greater focus on terrorisms apparent supporting use of organised crime.