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ILLICIT NETWORKS CONVERGENCE AND SECURITY IN THE AGE OF GLOBALIZATION: THE CRIME-TERROR NEXUS IN THE AMERICAS

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Exercise Solo Flight

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PCEMI 41

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EXERCISE *SOLO FLIGHT* – EXERCICE *SOLO FLIGHT*

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INTRODUCTION

International integration, made possible through advances in transportation and telecommunications infrastructure, has generated a distinct and global interdependence of cultural and economic activities. Though the impact of globalization has been argued across the scale of the good and bad, it remains complex to quantify. In respect to security however, this concept has ushered in a convergence of numerous illicit activities resulting in a growing threat to the livelihood of people around the world. One such threat is the confluence of criminal elements and terrorist groups plaguing regions of the Middle East, Asia, Africa, and the Americas.¹ Evidence suggests that narcotics trafficking, for example, play a crucial role in financing the activities of terrorist groups whilst the drug traffickers are employing terror tactics to empower themselves.² This paper will explore the crime-terror nexus and argue that terrorist groups will forge closer relationships with transnational criminals within the Americas in order to better their cause consequently deteriorating regional, hemispheric, and to some extent global security. This will be approached by initially countering Paul Shamella's critique; that the alliance between criminal networks and terrorists is simply a myth.³ Key to this counter will be the siting of examples of cooperation between these two groups. Thereafter the argument will hone in on the America's conundrum with this cooperation in recent years and conclude with approaches to fighting back.

¹ Giraldo, Jeane K. and Harold A. Trinkunas. *Terrorism Financing and State Responses: A Comparative Perspective*. (Stanford University Press 2007), 40.

² Wang, Peng. *The Crime-Terror Nexus: Transformation, Alliance, Convergence*. (School of Law, King's College London 2010), 11.

³ Shamella, Paul. *Fighting Back: What Governments Can Do About Terrorism*. (Stanford University Press, 2011) .

Before the argument is delved into, however, it is important that the definitional problem with terrorism be addressed. Terrorism is a term that is uniquely problematic to define and has no universally accepted definition.⁴ At the United Nations General Assembly of 13 November 1974, it was said that “...one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter” and the two are very difficult to differentiate.⁵ After the attack of 9/11 in the United States, a group labeled terrorist was often assigned emotionally, and the discussion had moral connotations. Domestic crime, civil insurrection, guerilla warfare or insurgency, war crimes, and even some military actions in accordance with the law of war constitute terror in one way or the other. For the purpose of this paper though, a working definition extracted from an expert in the field will be used. Dr. Forest defines terrorism as “a combination of strategies and violent tactics in which the victims (e.g. ordinary citizens) are a sub-element of a broader target (e.g. the government). These strategies and tactics are used by individuals or groups in pursuit of some type of objectives – typically of a political, social criminal, economic and/or religious nature – and they perceive terror to be the most effective way to obtain the power needed to achieve these objectives.”⁶ Although long winded this working definition represents the vast scholarship in the study of terrorism especially due to its complex nature.

CRIME-TERROR NEXUS: MYTH OR FACT?

It is important not to needlessly complicate the nature of terrorism in the contemporary world as this would be cause for more confusion of an already complex issue. However, it is also

⁴ Forest, James J.F. Dr. *The Terrorism Lectures: A Comprehensive Collection for Students of Terrorism, Counterterrorism, and National Security*. (Nortia Press 2012), 1.

⁵ Omaha, NE World Herald. *Terrorism To Get UN Study*. (December 1974), 16.

⁶ Forest, James J.F. Dr. *The Terrorism Lectures...*, 6.

very important that this significant security matter is not oversimplified. The reality is because of its unpredictable nature, terrorism keeps experts busy trying to understand and keep abreast of what is going to be the next breach to security. Essentially this part of the paper will explore examples of the convergence of terror and criminal groups and their similarities to argue that this nexus may suggest the terrorist's way of facilitating future goals. In looking at this convergence, the evidence will show that the crime-terror nexus indeed exists and although there are limited reasons now to believe that it will grow, the organizational learning capacities of terrorist networks suggest that they can capitalize on this nexus to support their ideological agenda.

After the Cold War era and with the disappearance of Soviet communism as an alternate ideology, the United States remained the only superpower. This ushered in opposing ethnic and religious movements around the world willing to use terror to realize their cause.⁷ The rise of "catastrophic" terrorism began in the nineties with the World Trade Center bombing in 1993 and the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995 proving what experts in the field had cautioned the United States was to be the start of the "most violent chapter in the history of terrorism."⁸ Thereafter many groups used terrorism as a means of political weaponry. It was the rise of Islamic militancy and radical teachings, though, which provoked the most dangerous security situation plaguing the world today.⁹ The dominance of the Islamic terrorist, through globalization and modernization, has shown where this group is able to work along with criminal elements to further its cause.¹⁰ In 1999 anti-globalization violence erupted around the world by opponents of

⁷ Nacos, Brigitte L. *Terrorism and Counterterrorism*. (Longman Publishing 2008), 47.

⁸ *Ibid.*...,45.

⁹ *Ibid.*...,47.

¹⁰ Holmes, Leslie. *Terrorism, Organized Crime and Corruption: Networks and Linkages*. (Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd. 2007), 7.

western-style industrial modernization and European left-leaning environmentalists.¹¹ They rejected the United States dominating globalization and consumerism which they saw as a direct attack on their traditional religions, ethic, political, and economic values. Anti-globalization fueled hate within many religious and ethnic groups resulting in radicalization and consequently bombing attacks in the United States, India, Indonesia, Morocco, Spain, and Saudi Arabia.¹² These attacks were conducted by radicals claiming to be striking in the name of God and their religion. Ironically, it is the fruits of globalization today, the technological advances and the ability to communicate globally, that have contributed to the survival of this evolutionary security threat. Terror groups have merged with criminal syndicates to finance their cause, depending on narco-funding and other illicit activities around the world to raise money and support their campaign.¹³

On 01 Oct 2004, the United Nations warned about the nexus between drugs, crime and terrorism and outlined the links between illicit drugs, organized crime, and international terrorism.¹⁴ From heroin trafficking in Afghanistan and Coca trafficking in the Andean countries to the Hashish trafficking in Morocco, billions of dollars are being generated to source terrorism.¹⁵ According to Leslie Holmes, "...when drug traffickers and terrorists combine, terrorist organizations derive benefits from the drug trade with no loss of status, and drug traffickers become more formidable and gain in political clout."¹⁶ Surely these benefits are capitalized upon. In 2009, a New York court charged three Malian nationals with narco-terrorism

¹¹ Nacos, Brigitte L. *Terrorism and...*, 48.

¹² *Ibid.*..., 49.

¹³ Holmes, Leslie. *Terrorism, Organized Crime and Corruption: Networks and Linkages*. (Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd. 2007), 31.

¹⁴ The Washington Post. "UN Warns About Nexus Between Drugs, Crime and Terrorism." Last Accessed 21 March 2015. <http://www.un.org/press/en/2004/soccp311.doc.htm>

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Holmes, Leslie. *Terrorism, Organized...*,29.

offenses with links to AQIM, FARC, and cocaine smugglers as they conspired to protect drug shipments from FARC across the Sahara.¹⁷ Later in April 2013, AQIM's involvement with drug smuggling was tied into a case of 168kg of cocaine seized at a UK port.¹⁸ The rise of AQIM and other groups in Africa has been linked to their involvement in criminal activities. In July 2008, Michael Brawn who is the assistant administrator and chief of operations at the US Drug Enforcement Administration commented on the nexus between drugs and terror:

The nexus between drugs and terror is growing at light speed. This is not a new trend...there have been numerous links identified between drugs and terror over the last twenty five years. Of the forty three officially designated terrorist organizations, the Drug Enforcement Administration has linked nineteen of them to some aspect of the global drug trade, and believes that up to sixty percent of terror organizations are connected with the illegal narcotics trade.¹⁹

The important question then to ask is what makes terrorist and these criminal groups work together? The answer lies in a few factors; the decline of state sponsorship of terrorism, the identification and disruption of private donors in terror financing, and the similarities shared by both groups.²⁰

The end of the Cold War saw the loss of the terrorist's main donor, the Soviet Union. While individual states like Iran and Libya still do support Hezbollah and Palestinian groups²¹ respectively, the reality is such states suffer the repercussions of their actions economically and therefore their support lacks sustainment. The Global War on Terrorism has successfully targeted regions with the ability to finance terror and has made great advances since 2001 through

¹⁷ Lacher, Wolfram. *Challenging the Myth of the Drug-Terror Nexus*. (West Africa Commission on Drugs, Koffi Annan Foundation 2014), 3.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ The Washington Institute. "Drug Trafficking and Middle Eastern Terrorist Groups: A Growing Nexus?" Last accessed 21 March 2015. <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/drug-trafficking-and-middle-eastern-terrorist-groups-a-growing-nexus>

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Biersteker, Thomas J. and Sue E. Eckert. *Countering the Financing of Terrorism*. (Routledge Publishing 2008), 101.

innovative strategies.²² Dishman in his account of *Terrorism, Crime, and Transformation* remarked that “the evaporation of funding sources encourages terrorist groups to develop into “narco-terrorists”, who increasingly engage in drug trafficking and other illicit organized crime to acquire money and material.”²³ Transnational organized criminals have been equally affected by security changes around the world and are forced to engage in terrorism activities to ensure survival. Both groups learn from each other’s successes and failures and partner from time to time to evade law enforcement.²⁴ Terrorist groups are trending towards using criminal activities to support their political ends and ideological objectives whilst criminal groups use terror tactics to gain economic ends due to pressure from international law enforcement.²⁵ Their similarities make this easy to do; both are generally rational actors, both use extreme violence and the threat of reprisals, both defy the state and rule of law, for a member to leave either group is rare and often fatal, both represent an asymmetrical threat to the United States and allies, both are highly adaptable, innovative and resilient, both have back up leaders and foot soldiers, and both have provided social services to their supporters.²⁶ Terrorist groups are now generating their own revenue through the engaging of criminal activities including narcotics, money laundering, kidnapping for ransom, and credit card fraud to name a few.²⁷ Transnational criminal groups are trending towards taking advantage of ungoverned chaos in dysfunctional states or weak state

²² Giraldo, Jeanne K. and Harold A. Trinkunas. *Terrorism Financing and State Responses: A Cooperative Perspective*. (Stanford University Press 2007), 282-296.

²³ Dishman, Chris. *Terrorism, Crime and Transformation: Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*. (Routledge Publishing, 2001), 24.

²⁴ Wang, Peng. *The Crime-Terror Nexus: Transformation, Alliance, Convergence*. (School of Law, King’s College London 2010), 13.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

²⁷ Forest, James J.F. Dr. *The Terrorism Lectures: A Comprehensive Collection for Students of Terrorism, Counterterrorism, and National Security*. (Nortia Press 2012), 135-137.

environments to generate huge profits from cooperation with terrorists.²⁸ It is this scenario that makes the Americas, particularly the south and central regions, vulnerable to this evolutionary security threat.

THE AMERICAS CONUNDRUM

The confluence of terrorist organizations and transnational criminal groups has occurred in strategic and tactical ways within the Americas. Strategic relationship usually involves a consistent interest to achieve mutual expectations of long term goals whilst tactical relationships are short without any complementary enduring goal. The Andean countries in South America and the Northern Triangle in Central America provide the perfect breeding grounds for this bonding, thereafter cascading a significant threat to North America. The aim here will be to look within the Americas for historical evidence of the crime-terror nexus to aid the argument that hemispheric security, and by extension global security is at risk if this threat is not severed early and measures put in place to guard against any potential reoccurrences. This will be done by analyzing those strategic and tactical relationships between criminal elements and terrorists who continue to collude within the Americas in an effort to deduce the elements driving this “metamorphosis.” Those deductions will then shape the existing and future threats to the security environment posed by the criminals and terrorist cooperation in this region.

As early as the 1950s terrorist groups from within the Americas have caused havoc to security. Puerto Rican Nationalists attempted to assassinate the United States President Harry

²⁸ Biersteker, Thomas J. and Sue E. Eckert. *Countering the Financing of Terrorism*. (Routledge Publishing 2008), 127.

Truman and the Armed Forces for National Liberation that spawned from these nationalists responsible for multiple bombings in Puerto Rico and the United States in that era, were two such groups.²⁹ Although initially labeled as common criminals and fanatics, their unwavering extremism was later dubbed as terrorism as their supporters grew. In Latin America, the Tupamaros or National Liberation Movement in Uruguay was another group active around this time which became the model for “urban guerilla warfare” across the region.³⁰ Later the FARC and National Liberation Army in Colombia and the Sendero Luminoso in Peru reigned supreme until the end of the twentieth century when they moved toward more criminal objectives.³¹ Others like the Sandinista National Liberation Front in Nicaragua and Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front in El Salvador both transformed to prominent political entities within their countries.³² Though it is argued that such groups during their time either gave up their cause or transformed instead of operated alongside criminal elements, globalization and other factors have made their survivors morph into groups with a terrorist-transnational crime relationship. This relationship, whether strategic or tactical, slices through the heart of security of that affected region. If this relationship was to be placed on a crime-terror continuum which is shown at figure 1.1 below and as Makarenko noted in her account of Global Crime when tracing the interplay between transnational organized crime and terrorism, it would “arrive at a convergence stage, which means organized crime and terrorists groups can converge into one single entity displaying both groups’ characteristics – a powerful and destructive organization seeking

²⁹ Nacos, Brigitte L. *Terrorism and Counterterrorism*. (Longman Publishing 2008), 73.

³⁰ *Ibid...*, 44.

³¹ Forest, James J.F. Dr. *The Terrorism Lectures...*, 141.

³² *Ibid...*, 211-212.

political and financial ambition.”³³ Therefore whether a transformation or a hybrid of crime and terror, it is evident that at some point a convergence is eminent. This convergence of the crime-terror nexus may be short term or have the potential for a long standing effect with both groups retaining the ability to move to the opposite end of the continuum from which it began. Few but tangible examples in South America illustrate this convergence of crime and terrorism. Notable are the elements of FARC working along with members of the Irish Republican Army in the sharing of bomb-making knowledge³⁴, narcotics moving from Colombia to Thailand and Afghanistan to be used for financing terror groups³⁵, and the Tri-border Area that to date still provides a safe haven for Hezbollah, the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas), Islamic Jihad, al Muqawamah, Egyptian Islamic Groups, and al Qaeda.³⁶

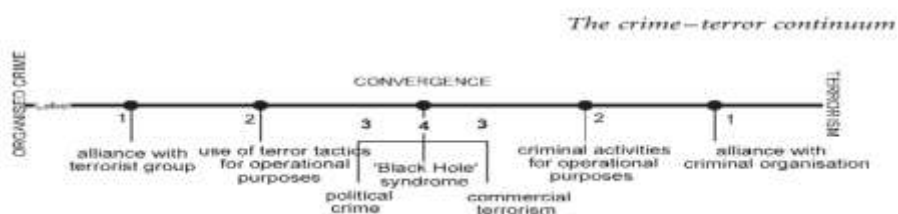


Figure 1.1 -The Crime-Terror Continuum

Source : Global Crime: The Crime-Terror Continuum, Tamara Makarenko, 3.

Though measuring this phenomenon is difficult, the well-developed financial institutions of South America and its instability and ineffectiveness of its legal and governmental institutions

³³ Makarenko, Tamara. “The Crime-Terror Continuum: Tracing the Interplay between Transnational Organized Crime and Terrorism.” Last accessed 21 March 2015. <http://www.iracm.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/makarenko-global-crime-5399.pdf>

³⁴ Wang, Peng. *The Crime-Terror Nexus: Transformation, Alliance, Convergence*. (School of Law, King’s College London 2010), 15.

³⁵ Giraldo, Jeanne K. and Harold A. Trinkunas. *Terrorism Financing and State Responses: A Cooperative Perspective*. (Stanford University Press 2007), 42.

³⁶ *Ibid.*..., 231-233.

provide a significant center for terrorist financing within this hemisphere.³⁷ It is these conditions that make the Northern Triangle of Central America equally vulnerable to harboring these illicit activities as Leslie Homes agreed to in his account of terrorism and organized crime. The Triangle consists of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras and is the most violent in the region. Honduras alone had the most homicides in the world at the national level in 2013 with over fifty percent of its population living in poverty.³⁸ Guatemala has a failing economy resulting in over fifty percent of its population living impoverish as well.³⁹ Salvador is known to harbor a number of illicit criminals that facilitate drugs transfer by land and sea to North America and has significant problems with poverty.⁴⁰ Plagued with money laundering and document forging, arms and drug smuggling and illegitimate commercial and financial operatives, these regions “have drawn considerable attention and provide an opportunity to get a good glimpse of the global terrorists, financial network”⁴¹ and the accompanied disintegration of security. The following, extracted from a case study entitled “Hezbollah in South America” provides a vivid example of a Hezbollah’s operation in the region:

...A Brazilian resident of Lebanese origin, Bakarar remains a fugitive and is reported to be living in the Brazilian Triple Border city with his Brazilian wife and children. Barakat was considered the top fund-raiser for Hezbollah in Paraguay, Brazil and Argentina tri-border area. He is well regarded by the Hezbollah leadership. In fact, Paraguayan police discovered a letter in which Hassan Nasrallah, the Hezbollah leader, thanked Barakat for his efforts on behalf of the children orphaned when their fathers were killed...⁴²

³⁷ Biersteker, Thomas J. and Sue E. Eckert. *Countering Terrorism...*,135.

³⁸ Research and Trend Analysis Branch United Nations. *UNODC Global Study on Homicide 2013* (United Nations Publications), 24.

³⁹ Chester A Crocker, Fen Osler, Pamela Hall. *Rewiring Regional Security in a Fragmented World* (US Institute of Peace Press 2011), 483.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Giraldo, Jeanne K. and Harold A. Trinkunas. *Terrorism Financing and State Response...*, 231.

⁴² Biersteker, Thomas J. and Sue E. Eckert. *Countering Terrorism...*,135.

The model at figure 1.2 below suggests relationships and transformations between terrorist organizations and criminal enterprises in this fragile part of the world. Many of them are already happening resulting in an increase threat to North America and the rest of the world whether directly or indirectly. Arms and Drugs smuggling appears to be the most significant reason for cooperation in this area but with the Central and Southern American States security deteriorating, it is only a matter of time before the cooperation grows even stronger across the crime-terror continuum to see evolutionary threats develop.

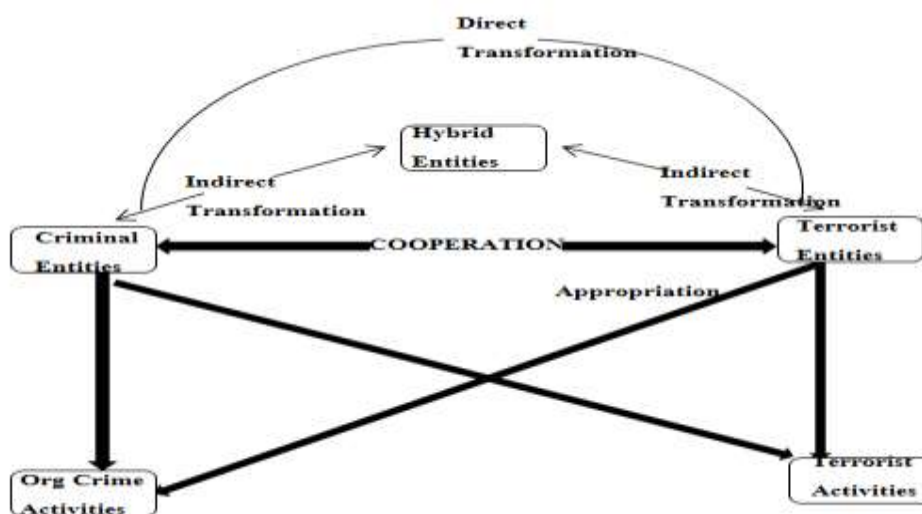


Figure 1.2 – Relationships and Transformations: Terrorists Organizations and Criminal Enterprises.
Source: Biersteker, J and Sue Eckert, *Countering the Financing of Terrorism*, 134.

These may range from cyber related breaches to terrorist capitalizing on the services of the illicit barons within the Americas to move weapons of mass destruction in their efforts to target the United States, a concern also considered by Leslie Holmes in his book on terror and crime collusion.⁴³ While this may seem extreme, it cannot be ignored. The attacks of 9/11 for example, revealed that an estimated \$300,000 of the \$500,000 used for the attack passed through the

⁴³ Holmes, Leslie. *Terrorism, Organized...*,33.

region's banking system.⁴⁴ Terrorists are running out of options and so are the criminal elements making it necessary for them to adapt and decentralize in order to survive the hostile law enforcement systems today.⁴⁵ The war on drugs in the Americas, particularly Plan Colombia and Plan Mexico or the Merida Initiative, that continues to be waged by partnering security forces and financed primarily by the United States have forced the drug cartels to rethink their strategies. Getting their illicit products to North America nonetheless, continues to prove that they are always a step ahead of law enforcement officials. It is this evasive ability possessed by criminal groups in the region that adds to the ease of collaboration between them and a terror group that may be trying to get to a target in North America. Mitigating the threat through fighting back may eventually see the regions' security forces gaining the upper hand.

FIGHTING BACK

While the protean character of crime and terrorist networks appear complex to counter, it is important that regional and hemispheric security forces work together in the Americas and the rest of the world for that matter, to target those elements within their societies that harbor or aid terrorist and crime activities. Today's terrorism is most often transnational or stateless and criminal activities are unconventional, swift, and irregular. Fighting back must be less of a deliberate conventional thinking to a strategy that is more in line with the threats faced. The Global War on Terrorism needs to shift efforts towards an emphasis against the root causes of terrorism, looking at existing advantages the crime-terror nexus offers these groups, and sever them swiftly. Doctor James Forest suggests:

⁴⁴ Biersteker, Thomas J. and Sue E. Eckert. *Countering Terrorism...*,253.

⁴⁵ Forest, James J.F. Dr. *The Terrorism Lectures: A Comprehensive Collection for Students...*, 385.

In addition to examining how terrorists engage in criminal activity, we also need to develop a solid understanding of where we see these kinds of criminal activities taking place. Factors that influence a terrorist or criminal organization's activities include access to weapons, illicit economies, and safe haven. Studies of these enablers are often driven by the desire to understand where and when criminals and terrorist activities (including collaboration) are most likely, and why. According to this area of research, there are specific locations throughout the world within which greater criminality, terrorism, and crime-terror collaboration have been facilitated in the past or are likely to be facilitated in the future...they must be addressed at the earliest.⁴⁶

Key to the success of understanding the factors influencing the terrorist or criminal organizations is sharing of information between domestic, regional, and international institutions.⁴⁷ Sharing intelligence ensures a common operational picture is developed between partnerships and allows for intercepting of threats. Another key component is training together to synchronize and exchange methodologies that are effective in severing terrorist and criminal activities. More experienced countries need to extend this opportunity to those less experienced through national military and policing partnership programs. When the threat does exist, wherever it may be, this training will allow for it to be kept localized and eventually neutralized.

Comprehensive strategies with a balance of liberty and security for citizens in the Americas are now very important. Although terrorist and crime elements do have the “advantages of speed and surprise, violence against innocent civilians will never give them the long-term legitimacy they seek.”⁴⁸ Replacing fear with security through mitigating the crime-terror confluence, governments can earn the loyalty of their citizens. This is the most powerful tool against crime and terror organizations.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 143.

⁴⁷ Shamella, Paul. *Fighting Back: What Governments Can Do About Terrorism*. (Stanford University Press 2011), 295.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

CONCLUSION

This paper sought to explore the crime-terror nexus and argue that terrorist groups will forge closer relationships with transnational criminals within the Americas in order to better their cause consequently deteriorating regional, hemispheric, and to some extent global security. Through analyzing past relationships between the two groups along with looking at their “modus operandi” in respect to each other, the similarities suggest without a doubt that these groups do work together to achieve their objectives. The crime-terror continuum further makes it clear that terrorists and criminal elements, especially those with ties to the drug trade, are able to adapt to evade law enforcement through employing strategies across the scale. While viewed by various pundits as a convergence or transformation and even as a hybrid, this evolving security conundrum complexes the already unstable global security environment. Technological advances and global communication make for an easier collusion of these groups although globalization initially appeared as the catalyst of the religious and ethnic uprisings. The nexus has appeared in South America and more specifically the Andean countries that provide a safe haven for the financing of terror groups through the use of multiple crime networking. The Northern Triangle of Central America is equally vulnerable to this nexus if there is no intervention through fighting back. Targeting the root problems of terrorism and crime through comprehensive strategies aim at gaining the loyalty of citizens in these regions is the best course of action for regional governments. Consequently, this will mitigate the threat to North America and by extension the rest of the world that may be affected by a catastrophic terrorist attack against the west.

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