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The Modern Crime-Terror Nexus and  
Jihadist Groups in Europe: A Social  
Perspective

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# Abstract

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The recent proliferation of jihadist incidents of terrorism in recent years has heightened interest in the modus operandi of terrorist operations. Available literature suggests a strong link between criminality and terrorism and the emergence of a crime-terror nexus. Current research on the nexus is based on dated examples and very rarely incorporates theory or an analytical lens. The purpose of this thesis is to explore modern manifestations of the crime-terror nexus from a social perspective in response to emerging data. The research reviews recent open-source data and literature at the institutional level, organisational level and the individual/social level. Analysis was approached from selected social and criminological angles including rational choice theory and a social psychological standpoint. Conclusions pointed to the increasing importance of social factors in areas such as radicalisation and group interactions to the processes of terrorism. Rather than attempting to explain causality, the study simply encourages the use of alternative perspectives when addressing the threat of terrorism. The thesis encourages academics and policy-makers to address the crime-terror nexus as a social problem that is fast becoming a national security threat. The research also highlights the importance of developing a multi-faceted response to challenges of the interaction between crime and terrorism in Europe. Future research may seek to build upon this approach from alternative theoretical perspectives, select different terrorist actors, or conduct empirical research where available in order to expand the field.

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## Introduction

The increase in Salafi-jihad related incidents of terrorism in Europe in recent years has prompted discussions on the operational procedures of terrorist organisations. Academics and policymakers have engaged in debates over the existence of what is frequently referred to as the ‘crime-terror nexus’ for the last few decades.<sup>1</sup> This term represents the putative intersection between crime and terrorism and the notion that the interplay between criminal and terrorist networks is apparent to the extent that a nexus can be realised. Some argue that the scope of the nexus is inflated in academic literature, while others advocate that the relationship between crime and terrorism exists more on a continuum or a fluctuating scale rather than a definitive nexus.<sup>2</sup> While scepticism is necessary to progress arguments and consolidate the debate, especially when taking into account regional and contextual idiosyncrasies, more reports and studies are emerging from across Europe that now recognise the crime-terror nexus as a multi-faceted security threat.<sup>3</sup>

Data from emerging research has suggested that in Europe, the traditional organised criminal utility of terrorist tactics is waning and is being substituted by an upward trend of individual minor criminals implementing terrorist attacks<sup>4</sup>. Supplementing their modus operandi of funding through traditional organised criminal activities, jihadist groups such as the Islamic State (IS) have added a dimension to the complexity of the nexus by recruiting individuals in Europe to carry out relatively low-cost attacks self-funded via petty crime.<sup>5</sup> Through the medium of social media, groups such as ISIS and other Salafi-jihadist groups have been able to remotely radicalise criminals at an individual level to plan and carry out attacks in Europe free from the limitations of borders. Although criminality and terrorism are far from a new phenomenon, the apparent notion that criminality may be relevant to an individual’s extremism in the form of how they are radicalised and how it affects their subsequent operational behaviour is a concept worth exploring.

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<sup>1</sup> Tamara Makarenko. 2004. "The Crime-Terror Continuum: Tracing the Interplay between Transnational Organised Crime and Terrorism". *Global Crime* 6 (1): 129-145.

<sup>2</sup> Colin Clarke. 2016. *Crime and Terror in Europe: Where the Nexus Is Alive And Well*. International Centre for Counter Terror - The Hague. <https://icct.nl/publication/crime-and-terror-in-europe-where-the-nexus-is-alive-and-well/>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> European Union. 2017. "Examining the Nexus Between Organised Crime and Terrorism and Its Implications for EU Programming". The Hague: Counter-Terrorism Monitoring, Reporting and Support Mechanism. Page 3.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

While there is some academic literature available on the crime-terror nexus, it appears that this area has been under-researched and until recently, proclaimed links between terrorism and crime have often been dismissed.<sup>6</sup> This purpose of this thesis is not to quantify the nexus, but rather to demonstrate the dynamics of its recent exhibition and explore how this can contribute to the understandings of this complex concept. These seemingly recent manifestations of the crime-terror nexus will be used to track available information on the evolution of the nexus in relation to modern European jihad. This thesis will aim to consider these more recent fluctuations from a social perspective, which is imperative to understand when assessing the implications for counter-terrorism strategies.

Separately, terrorism and crime are relatively well represented in interdisciplinary research, and the topics are often intersected with many other fields of study such as politics, international relations and security studies. Although the two fields can often share contextual crossovers, they are studied in relative isolation from each other. In reality, the spheres of criminality and terrorism interact in such a way that it would seem inconceivable for them to exist in theoretical vacuums. The effect of treating them as separate entities imposes ambiguous subject boundaries which often limits the understanding of the ways in which they interrelate. Examining the differences and similarities in areas relating to the two fields may afford an appreciation of the forms of interaction while illuminating ways in which both fields stand to learn from the other. One of the main criticisms found when reviewing the available literature on the crime-terror nexus is that theoretical understandings are very rarely taken into account during analysis. This may be due to the crossover of disciplines or for a variety of reasons, but if terrorism and crime are found to be connected, it seems feasible that the study of terrorism and explorations of the nexus can benefit from and expand through the viewpoint of criminological and sociological lenses.

Both crime and terrorism research face similar notorious challenges, and reliable empirical research to use as a baseline for wider analysis is few and far between.<sup>7</sup> Data is particularly sparse in terrorism studies, largely suffering from acute access issues. Terrorism researchers often face grave challenges obtaining access to first-hand accounts from terrorists due to a multitude of evident issues such as anonymity, gatekeepers, willingness to cooperate with

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<sup>6</sup> Rajan Basra, Peter Neumann, and Claudia Brunner. 2016. *Criminal Pasts, Terrorist Futures: European Jihadists and the New Crime-Terror Nexus*. London: International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence. <http://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Criminal-Pasts-Terrorist-Futures.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> Andrew Silke. 2004. *Research on Terrorism: Trends, Achievements and Failures*. London: Frank Cass. Page 2.

researchers and access to incarcerated individuals. Criminology studies also struggle with barriers to obtaining relevant and reliable information. On the other hand, criminologists are afforded a greater standard of data and have more access methods to their target research population that terrorism researchers are simply devoid of. Although it would be untrue to say that criminals can serve as a stand-in 'proxy population' in terrorism research, some scholars argue that if certain contextual variables are similar in criminal and terrorist populations, some observed behaviours in criminals may be used to help inform terrorism research.<sup>8</sup> In this sense, the more empirically robust stature of criminological research could hypothetically be used as a point of reference and a support function when exploring speculative theories of terrorist behaviour. For this reason, this thesis takes the standpoint that comparisons between social and psychological processes between the worlds of crime and terrorism may identify some significant parallels which can inform counter-strategies. On this basis, this research embarked on a social and criminological exploration of open-source data related to the jihadist crime-terror nexus in Europe.

## 1. Definitions

Both crime and terrorism share certain similarities. Definitions of terrorism are often marred by legal complexities, prone to cultural variation and can occasionally be politically charged. The main aspects included in Western definitions are usually pinned to politically and religiously motivated violence by non-state actors, typically aimed at non-combatant or civilian targets.<sup>9</sup> While many definitions of terrorism are focussed on the resulting violence, the vast majority of descriptions are exclusionary of many of the central activities that occupy the time of terrorists and their organisations. Because of the finality of terrorism definitions and the concentration on violent acts, legal frameworks still struggle to incorporate various activities committed by terrorists into legal terrorist offenses and thus, individuals involved in illicit acts that benefit terrorist causes are often restricted to prosecution under 'ordinary' criminal law.<sup>10</sup>

There are certain difficulties involved in defining terrorism, but for the purposes of the research, it is important to outline the definitional parameters in order to underpin generalisations. Understandings of organised crime and terrorism have been lifted from definitions from the European Union and international institutions. Institutional definitions were chosen in this

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<sup>8</sup> Sam Mullins. 2009. "Parallels Between Crime and Terrorism: A Social Psychological Perspective". *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 32 (9): 812.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> Gary Lafree, and Laura Dugan. 2004. "How Does Terrorism Compare to Studying Crime". In *Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism: Criminological Perspectives*, 5th ed., 54. Oxford: Elsevier.

thesis so they could be free from academic bias and so the crime-terror nexus can be measured against internationally accepted definitions within the European context.

The following working definitions will be ascribed to this study:

*Organised Crime:*

The foundational definition that will be used to define organised crime in this thesis will be derived from the Expert Group on Organised Crime of the Council of Europe in 1997, as stated in the European Union's 2012 crime-terror nexus report.<sup>11</sup> To be categorised as an organised criminal group, the group must meet four mandatory criteria. An organised crime group must:

- Comprise of at least three members.
- Cooperate with each other for a prolonged period of time.
- Be suspected of or previously charged with committing serious offences.
- Have the pursuit of monetary gain or power as a primary objective.

This description has been selected as it has already been adopted by the European Union in relation to the crime-terror nexus. An intercontinental definition is required to fulfil its operational purpose within this study as this thesis refers to events across the European theatre. Specific criminal enterprises that traditionally fall under the umbrella of organised crime will be defined and expanded upon where necessary throughout.

Despite the use of this definition within the EU's crime-terror report, recent EU documents suggest that although member states often use the term 'transnational organised crime' to refer to crimes such as money laundering, financial crime and drug trafficking, many states have declined to agree on a universal European definition.<sup>12</sup> Terminology such as 'serious crime' has been preferred in the past, as although the crime may be serious and can affect interstate security, many operations can be regarded as disorganised, and related to specific opportunities. This viewpoint of this thesis aligns with this notion as often general analysis of organised crime homogenises the diverse nature of group structures involved in criminality. Along with terrorist groups, organised crime syndicates are appearing in a less hierarchical form and thus, the terminology of 'serious crime' may prove more accurate at the European level. However, as

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<sup>11</sup> Tamara Makarenko. 2012. "Europe's Crime-Terror Nexus: Links between Terrorist and Organised Crime Groups in the European Union". Brussels: European Parliament: Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs.

<sup>12</sup> James Sheptycki, Hager B Jaffel, and Didier Bigo. 2011. "International Organised Crime in the European Union". Brussels: European Parliament. Page 10.

the vast majority of crime-terror nexus literature still references terms such as ‘transnational organised crime’, this research will still utilise these terms for simplicity and consistency. Despite the use of these terms throughout, the thesis will use organised crime as an umbrella term to denote to both organised and disorganised serious crime.

*Terrorism:*

The international community largely remains divided over a universally recognised definition of terrorism. Despite the increase in multi-state approaches addressing the threat of terrorism, the differing positions held by individual countries and international organisations has led to a patchwork of definitional approaches. While terrorism can be defined in many ways, it is necessary to bind future analysis to a degree of specificity in order to decipher terrorism in the context of other conceptual complexities. The approach taken by the EU is enshrined within the 2001 Council Common Position on combating terrorism which defines terrorism offences as:

“Acts committed with the intention of seriously intimidating a population, unduly compelling a government or international organisation to perform or abstain from performing any act, or seriously destabilising or destroying the fundamental political, constitutional, economic or social structures of a country or an international organisation.”<sup>13</sup>

The EU definition was chosen for this study as a European perspective fits the cultural milieu of this analysis and will also address current trends in terrorism within the European Union. This thesis will focus specifically on Salafi-jihadi terrorism; however, other relevant examples of terrorist organisations and jihadi affiliated terrorist groups that are more focused on nationalist or political goals may be considered in various criminal contexts where applicable. Jihadist terrorist organisations were selected for this thesis as recent terrorism trends suggest that jihadist terrorism is one of the largest terrorist threats affecting Europe as a whole. Furthermore, jihadist groups have a larger plethora of available data and research. Future research could replicate some similar themes addressed in this thesis and could examine the identified themes in the context of other prominent terrorist threats or fringe groups across Europe or from within individual states.

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<sup>13</sup> The Council of the European Union. 2001. "The Council Common Position on the Application of Specific Measures to Combat Terrorism". Brussels: Official Journal of the European Communities. Page 93.



## **MSc SECINTEL Independent Study (Dissertation)**

### 2. Research aims and objectives

- To explore the role the crime-terror nexus model in relation to jihadist networks in Europe.
- To address the crime-terror nexus at the institutional, organisational and social level.
- To analyse available data from a criminological and social perspective.

## Literature Review

### *The Relationship between Crime and Terrorism*

Definitional challenges also extend to the extent that terrorism and crime overlap. The most common angle in research is the relationship between terrorist organisations and organised crime groups. Concentration on institutional-level interplay dominates the field of crime-terror research, particularly in earlier writings. Although this level of analysis importantly highlights criminal activity on a larger scale, it could be argued that focusing solely on this area may limit understandings of the crime-terror continuum. While Shelley and Picarelli<sup>14</sup> mainly share their observations at a higher level, they also recognise that smaller scale petty crime can play a crucial operational role in the funding of international terrorist groups. Even Abu-Hamza, infamous Al Qaeda ideologue of London's Finsbury Park mosque has been involved in common benefit fraud.<sup>15</sup> Curtis and Karacan proclaim that involvement in a criminal enterprise at an organisational-level prompts ideological terrorists to "think as businessmen".<sup>16</sup> Through this logic, it could be argued that engaging in lower-level crime may inspire terrorists to tune their mindsets towards more 'average criminals'.

It is clear that crime and terrorism intersect on many operational levels. Although the nature of the relationship between the two often remains ambiguous, studying the two fields concurrently allows for an appreciation of the complexity of each phenomenon. Increased similarities in the modus operandi of criminals and terrorists signify shared knowledge, activity appropriation and the merging of networks. This in itself arguably makes a case for the utilisation of criminological understandings to add a valuable perspective to contemporary terrorism studies.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Louise Shelley and John Picarelli, "Methods Not Motives: Implications of the Convergence of International Organised Crime and Terrorism," *Police Practice and Research: An International Journal* 3(4) (2002), Page 305.

<sup>15</sup> Daniel Foggo and Simon Trump. 2001. "Benefit Fraud Ring Funds Islamic Terrorists". *The Telegraph*, 2001. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1362690/Benefit-fraud-ring-funds-Islamic-terrorists.html>.

<sup>16</sup> Glenn Curtis and Tara Karacan, *The Nexus Among Terrorists, Narcotics Traffickers, Weapons Proliferators, and Organized Crime Networks in Western Europe* (Washington,DC:Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 2002).

<sup>17</sup> Sam Mullins. 2009. "Parallels Between Crime and Terrorism: A Social Psychological Perspective". *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 32 (9): 814.

*The Crime-Terror Nexus: Background*

Towards the end of the twenty-first century, a wave of global market reforms broke down borders all over the world that had previously been sealed off to world trade, vastly increasing transnational flows. Although many positive outcomes followed globalisation and political liberation, an increasingly growing marketplace opened states up to new security challenges from illicit actors following suit and taking advantage of a plethora of new business opportunities.<sup>18</sup> Globalisation increased the value of networks in both legal and illegal enterprise. Instead of relying on close proximity personnel to be competent in a wide range of necessary operational skillsets, various functions were now able to be outsourced, a tool often utilised by criminal groups. Fluid and adaptable networks of individuals or groups were able to collaborate and disband based on the requirements of the endeavour.<sup>19</sup> Enterprises such as the manufacturing of false identities and money laundering became a trade open for business by independent contractors who may also share connections with multiple criminal networks. This effect of 'democratising' the criminal underworld reduced the need for larger hierarchal organisations to provide the connections and infrastructure to run operations.<sup>20</sup>

The increase in migration flows, the movement of people across borders and their ability to remain connected to their homelands through technology added to the growth of networks and clusters. Pivotal geopolitical changes such as the dismantling of the Iron Curtain opened up an array of opportunities for economic migrants, and the spike in civil wars across the world welcomed a new generation of refugees.<sup>21</sup> These diasporas opened the door to the social conditions and community bonds that help facilitate the growth of not only legitimate business but a transnational criminal enterprise. For example, Chinese triads operating in Hong Kong, the USA and Western Europe make use of links maintained through similar ethnic and cultural connections with individuals across borders to establish overseas trade.<sup>22</sup> Individuals and populations who have not assimilated into the mainstream culture are thought to be vulnerable to exploitation by criminal groups while maintaining a distant relationship with local law enforcement. Although these elements of family and ethnic ties are undoubtedly influential,

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<sup>18</sup> Marinko Bobic. 2014. "Transnational Organised Crime and Terrorism: Nexus Needing a Human Security Framework". *Global Crime* 15 (3-4): 244.

<sup>19</sup> Fiona B Adamson. 2005. "Globalisation, Transnational Political Mobilisation, and Networks of Violence". *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 18 (1): 32.

<sup>20</sup> Tamara Makarenko. 2004. "The Crime-Terror Continuum: Tracing the Interplay between Transnational Organised Crime and Terrorism". *Global Crime* 6 (1): 131.

<sup>21</sup> Adamson, "Globalisation, Transnational Political Mobilisation, and Networks of Violence". 33.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

this connection is often overstated and can lead to the broad labelling that is often misleadingly utilised by law-enforcement agencies and the media to connect individuals and groups with similar backgrounds to infamous transnational organised crime organisations.

Alongside the globalisation boom creating opportunities for transnational crime, both transnational and internal terrorist organisations have increasingly taken advantage of the growing black market and criminal activity as a funding resource.<sup>23</sup> Conflicts in regions including Angola, Chechnya, Liberia and the Balkans exemplified how weakened states intertwined with the rise of globalisation and networked structures powered violent and political entities to broaden their economic programmes and networks. African warlords have exploited the diamond trade, and multiple insurgent groups in some oil-rich, war-torn Middle Eastern countries have resold commandeered petroleum across the world into the ever-lucrative oil trade.<sup>24</sup>

The same impact of globalisation that has invigorated world trade and fuelled criminal activity has increased opportunities for terrorist groups. It is thought that the restructuring of criminal organisations in the 1990s allowed terrorist organisations to interact more freely with the criminal underworld.<sup>25</sup> Along with utilising crime to fund their activities, terrorist groups have also sought services from criminals to support operations, from trafficking arms to counterfeiting identity documents. One of the most prominent state security concerns surrounding this party interaction is that terrorists may gain the connections to procure weapons of mass destruction from criminals sold on the black market. Some of the assault rifles used by militants during the 2015 Paris attacks were found to be former Yugoslavian state arsenal, believed to be acquired illegally online.<sup>26</sup> Experts say that the vast majority of weaponry used by the Islamic State terrorist organisation Boko Haram are either bought from the prolific Central African arms black market or stolen from state military inventory.<sup>27</sup> While there is

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<sup>23</sup> Picarelli, John. 2008. "Transnational Organised Crime". In *Security Studies: An Introduction*, 1st ed., 457. Oxon: Routledge. Page 457.

<sup>24</sup> Fiona B Adamson. 2005. "Globalisation, Transnational Political Mobilisation, and Networks of Violence". *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 18 (1): 32.

<sup>25</sup> Tamara Makarenko. 2004. "The Crime-Terror Continuum: Tracing the Interplay between Transnational Organised Crime and Terrorism". *Global Crime* 6 (1): 132.

<sup>26</sup> Reuters. 2015. "Some Guns Used in Paris Attacks Produced in Ex-Yugoslavia's Arsenal", 2015. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-france-shooting-serbia/some-guns-used-in-paris-attacks-produced-in-ex-yugoslavia-arsenal-idUSKBN0TH0A220151128>.

<sup>27</sup> Robert Windrem. 2014. "Missing Nigeria Schoolgirls: Where Boko Haram Gets Its Weapons". *NBC*, 2014. <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/missing-nigeria-schoolgirls/missing-nigeria-schoolgirls-where-boko-haram-gets-its-weapons-n104861>.

plentiful corroborating evidence of connections between the worlds of crime and terrorism, there has been a great deal of discussion and disagreements over their meaning and significance.

The formal linking of crime and terrorism is not a new concept. The crime-terror nexus was largely conceptualised from the precedent set by narco-terrorism in the 1980s, the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s and the emergence of the Information Age.<sup>28</sup> The increasingly visible link between crime and terrorism established the role of crime as an important subsidiary in the ever-evolving study of terrorism. Transnational organised crime rose in prevalence alongside the development of modern understandings of terrorism studies, consolidating the concept of the crime-terror nexus. This led to the study of two traditionally separately examined phenomena merging together to reveal multiple structural and operational similarities.<sup>29</sup>

Particularly during the 1980s and the rise of the Colombian drug cartels, scholars have debated whether these rampant reigns of narco-terrorism represented a tangible case of the crossover of criminal-terrorist lines.<sup>30</sup> The term 'criminal insurgency' has been occasionally used in an attempt to label the threat to state security posed by criminal operations. Political and terrorist organisations are also known to have depended on criminal activity for functionality, such as the Taliban relying on opiate production in Afghanistan and groups like the Irish Republican Army (IRA) smuggling petrol and counterfeited goods.<sup>31</sup> In the years following 9/11, there were indications that ties between organised crime and terrorism were developing additional intricacies. The move towards consolidation could be attributed to more proactive counter-terrorism efforts focussing on the operational structure of terrorist groups, leading to an enhanced understanding of the ties between organised crime and terrorism. These connections usually stemmed from the outsourcing of an operational function, such as terror groups

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<sup>28</sup> Tamara Makarenko. 2004. "The Crime-Terror Continuum: Tracing the Interplay between Transnational Organised Crime and Terrorism". *Global Crime* 6 (1): 129-145.

<sup>29</sup> Chris Dishman. 2001. "Terrorism, Crime, and Transformation". *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 24 (43).

<sup>30</sup> Picarelli, John T. 2012. "Osama Bin Corleone? Vito The Jackal? Framing Threat Convergence Through an Examination of Transnational Organized Crime and International Terrorism". *Terrorism and Political Violence* 24 (2): 183.

<sup>31</sup> Tamara Makarenko. 2012. "Europe's Crime-Terror Nexus: Links between Terrorist and Organised Crime Groups in the European Union". Brussels: European Parliament: Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs: 16.

engaging an organised crime syndicate to provide fraudulent identity documents or access to human trafficking and trade routes.<sup>32</sup>

Despite these developments, the crime-terror nexus remains understudied, ill-understood and porous to the limitations of academic tunnel vision from a specific perspective rather than a holistic viewpoint. The concept has not only failed to gain significant traction in academia but has often been overlooked for being too broad to draw significant parallels. Most literature is fixated around the angle of terrorist groups and criminal activity as a means of financing.<sup>33</sup> Although financial motivations are certainly an important feature, upon further review this appears to be only one of multiple offshoots of this complex phenomena. This research attempts to delve deeper into some other areas of interest to gain a further understanding of the relationship. Among scholars, there is a prevailing outdated assumption that both terrorist and criminal syndicates function under a monolithic or hierarchal structure rather than a series of complex networks and thus, cross-connections are studied as such<sup>34</sup>. Taking this into account, the research will be inclusive of the loose affiliations and the decentralised networks that coincide with modern findings of the nature of terrorist clusters. The supposition that both ideological and criminal incentives are totally removed from each other limits the scope of the field. The two motivations will be studied from the perspective that they are not mutually exclusive, and it is possible for an individual to exhibit extremist ideology whilst also participating in criminal functions. Furthermore, particularly in radicalisation literature, Western-based terrorists are depicted as well as educated individuals raised in the middle to upper-class backgrounds.<sup>35</sup> Through this understanding, any crossover between Western terrorists and the under-class or criminal underworld would seem abstruse. In response to this, this research will take expand from previous assumptions about the backgrounds of modern terrorists and acknowledge the potential disparity in terrorist typologies.

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<sup>32</sup> Tamara Makarenko. 2012. "Europe's Crime-Terror Nexus: Links between Terrorist and Organised Crime Groups in the European Union". Brussels: European Parliament: Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs: 16.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Chris Dishman. 2005. "The Leaderless Nexus: When Crime and Terror Converge". *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 28 (3): 241.

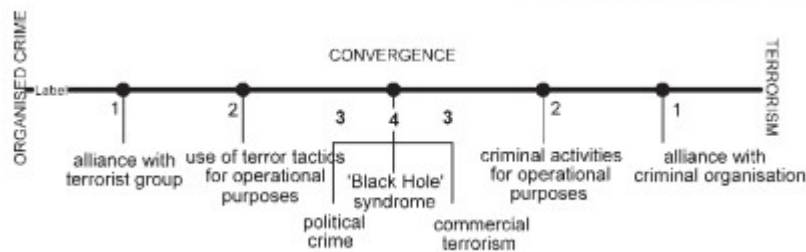
<sup>35</sup> Edwin Bakker. 2006. "Jihadi Terrorists in Europe: Their Characteristics and the Circumstances in Which they Joined the Jihad: An Exploratory Study". Clingendael: The Hague, Netherlands Institute of International Relations. Page 31.

*Mapping the Nexus*

At its core, the crime-terror nexus denotes to the relationship between crime and terrorism. As previously stated, the most frequent application of the nexus in literature is relative to the utilisation of criminal enterprise by terrorist groups as a source of financial upkeep. Aside from illegal terrorism offences, crimes often associated with terrorist organisations include; participation in the drug trade, the sale of illegal arms, money laundering, counterfeiting goods, fraudulent identity documents and human trafficking.<sup>36</sup> The nexus traditionally has also been used to identify and allude to the development of alliances between terrorist organisations and organised crime networks.<sup>37</sup> From a reflection of available literature, the study of the nexus is generally be characterised into 3 different pillars: institutional, organisational and social. These three distinctions designed the structure of the thesis and provided a framework for analysis.

*Institutional*

The figure below depicts a basic linear model of the nexus.<sup>38</sup> Prominent nexus scholar Tamara Makarenko explains that terrorism and organised crime groups exist on a sliding continuum, and thus, the possibility of convergence exists at a central point. The left side of the model represents organised crime groups, with traditional terrorist organisations situated on the far right. Displayed in the centre lies the point of ‘convergence’, thought to be where an entity instantaneously and equally possesses both criminal and terrorist characteristics and habits.



Following this model<sup>39</sup>, Makarenko identified three types of institutional linkages between organised crime and terrorism: co-operation, convergence and transformation. The co-operation step is a direct alliance between a criminal organisation and a terrorist group. This is when two separate groups participate in temporary ad hoc or long-term cooperative engagement

<sup>36</sup> Steven Hutchinson and Pat O’Malley. 2007. "A Crime–Terror Nexus? Thinking on Some of the Links between Terrorism and Criminality". *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 30 (12): 1095.

<sup>37</sup> Makarenko, Tamara. 2004. "The Crime-Terror Continuum: Tracing the Interplay between Transnational Organised Crime and Terrorism". *Global Crime* 6 (1): 129-145.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

for the mutual operational benefit. An example of this could be groups seeking expertise in transferable skills such as in money-laundering, trade routes, or direct trade of goods such as drugs in exchange for arms, as witnessed in South America<sup>40</sup>. The conversion phase relates to the appropriation of a strategy used by another network. This could mean criminal organisations may adopt tactics associated with terrorism to achieve their goals, and terrorist groups may engage in illegal business enterprises, usually as a financing method. This removes the outside intermediary from operations and by developing in-house capabilities, the demand for forthright alliances declines. During the final phase from the linear nexus, the transformation thesis extends to two independent, but not mutually exclusive components. It refers to crime groups that develop a political agenda over time that eventually dominates their initial financially motivated agenda, such as the Dawood Ibrahim Company in India<sup>41</sup>. This step is illustrative of originally politically motivated terrorist organisations whose interests evolve to equally prioritise profit maximisation, often using political motivations as a façade for justifying criminal activity, e.g. Abu Sayyaf<sup>42</sup>.

The development of the institutional model of the nexus and Makarenko's research provided a pivotal platform for the expansion of the crime-terror field. The framework continues to be cited in almost every debate and still remains impactful. Despite the vital foundational utility of the institutional model, there are certain aspects of the relationship between crime and terrorism that the model fails to address. The model focuses on the interactions between criminal and terrorist organisations on a wider scale, often treating its members as a holistic unit harmoniously making goal-based strategic decisions rather than taking into account internal interplay and contextual relevance. There are very few theoretical analyses at the institutional level and almost none from a social or theoretical perspective. Nonetheless, the institutional approach is still relevant to crime-terror research and was incorporated into the research framework to explore in the context of jihadist groups in modern Europe.

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<sup>40</sup> Tamara Makarenko. 2012. "Europe's Crime-Terror Nexus: Links between Terrorist and Organised Crime Groups in the European Union". Brussels: European Parliament: Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs.

<sup>41</sup> Steven Hutchinson and Pat O'Malley. 2007. "A Crime-Terror Nexus? Thinking on Some of the Links between Terrorism and Criminality". *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 30 (12): 1095.

<sup>42</sup> Rob Atwell. 2017. "Criminals with a Cause: The Crime-Terror Nexus in the Southern Philippines". *The Diplomat*, 2017. <https://thediplomat.com/2017/04/criminals-with-a-cause-the-crime-terror-nexus-in-the-southern-philippines/>.



*Organisational*

Around the same time as Makarenko was developing the institutional paradigm, Letizia Paoli was researching structural and organisational comparisons between gangs of young people and terrorist clusters, which she observed as ‘clannish’ style organisations.<sup>43</sup> Paoli concluded that similarities existed between criminal and terrorist groups. The organisational pillar of crime-terror nexus research focuses on how the individuals interact internally within the group and the comparison to crime syndicates. Membership of either a criminal or terrorist organisation both involve unlawful and sometimes violent activity whilst demanding and relying on an absolute commitment from their members. Furthermore, most high-level organisations require complete subordination to the collective interests and goals of the group. Paoli believes that the organisational formula, an amalgamation between kinship and violence, appears to be critical to the survival of unlawful collectives as the majority of illicit groups appear to rely on it for group cohesion.<sup>44</sup>

Paoli believes that the central function of organised groups relates to interpersonal problems and rewarding relationships that provide members with the security, cohesion and status that individuals lack in their societal environment.<sup>45</sup> Due to these social bonds, she concludes that as the foundations of these groups are embedded in noneconomic ties, groups that have a strong social base are able to perform better in illegal markets in a more organised way compared to others. In Paoli’s opinion, if organised crime is interpreted as a set of criminal organisations, it is nonsensical to disregard similarities between groups based on differing motivations. Paoli projected the view that by clearly distinguishing criminals and terrorist groups on the basis of their overt objectives, i.e. profit vs. politics or ideology, could be misleading as goals often blur and can change over time. This thesis expands this notion in later chapters.

Through this logic, different strategic goals should not act as an obstruction to comparative analysis, and thus, the conditions that lead clusters of individuals to consolidate and prosper must be examined in a similar way. Most research on this organisational likeness is centred on outdated references to classic examples of organised crime syndicates. Although Paoli agrees that terrorist groups should be studied similarly, most of the research at the organisational level is fixated on crime syndicates rather than terrorist organisations. Similar organisational ties and social bonds that are often used to identify similarities between organised crime groups will be examined during the analysis of modern Jihadist groups in Europe. The main focus for this area

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<sup>43</sup> Letizia Paoli, “The Paradoxes of Organized Crime”, *Crime, Law, and Social Change*, Vol 37, No 1, 2002, pp. 51-97.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

of research will be assessing how jihadist groups in recent years have been functioning as an organisation in regard to their criminal activity with a focus on how they operate together, how they incentivise each other, how they manage each other as a team and whether this is effective for-profit returns. This will be assessed from a similar social and theoretical angle as older research considers the mode of operations of criminal gangs.

### *Social*

From a review of the most recent open-source data and literature, the significance of the social aspects of the crime-terror nexus is apparent. Basra and Neumann found in recent studies that the convergence of criminal and terrorist networks are moving away from the organisational or structural level, but rather their social environments and networks become intertwined.<sup>46</sup> Rather than the traditional transformation and convergence steps, they suggest that criminal and terrorist networks are crossing paths and recruiting from milieus within a comparable social context. They conclude that this often creates synergies and overlap as the two worlds blend together, whether it's intentional or not. From an initial investigation of this relatively new 'fourth wave' manifestation of the crime-terror nexus, the main recurrent themes that repeatedly surface are the relationship between the processes of radicalisation, the role of the prison environment, socio-economic status, the transfer of skills and crime as a source of financing. These are the themes that were identified and utilised for analysis in this research.

### *Radicalisation*

An area of focus for this thesis will be on the suggestion that there is an upcoming trend that terrorist networks and criminals are now recruiting through from similar social environments. The presence of current and former criminals as members of terrorist organisations is hardly a new phenomenon. The continued mobilisation of European jihadists by groups such as IS has led to the criminal elements of these groups to gain visibility. Emerging data suggests that individuals with criminal histories may be being targeted as a recruitment strategy.<sup>47</sup> The criminal histories of known recent jihadi terrorists were examined to explore how the backgrounds of individuals may connect to their involvement in terrorist groups.

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<sup>46</sup> Rajan Basra and Peter R. Neumann, "Criminal Pasts, Terrorist Futures: European Jihadists and the New Crime-Terror Nexus", *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol 10, No 6, 2016, pp. 25-40.

<sup>47</sup> Rajan Basra, Peter Neumann, and Claudia Brunner. 2016. *Criminal Pasts, Terrorist Futures: European Jihadists and the New Crime-Terror Nexus*. London: International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence. <http://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Criminal-Pasts-Terrorist-Futures.pdf>.

There has been tentative evidence to suggest that groups such as IS have been supplementing their traditional criminal operations with recruiting individuals in Europe who are known criminals in order to orchestrate low cost, self-funded attacks, mostly financed through petty crime. The use of social media as a recruitment tool has garnered attention as researchers uncovered more and more of an active presence of jihadist groups on social media forums and even members of organised specifically dedicated to recruiting western members online.<sup>48</sup> By initiating a channel of communication with susceptible populations, jihadist groups have created the opportunity to remotely radicalise criminals on an individual level and provoke them to coordinate attacks in their name, complying with their agenda and free from the physical limitations of borders. The role of the internet and online communications are expanded in this research. Although the impact of the internet on radicalisation has been briefly discussed in previous literature, the targeting of criminals and how this affects the crime-terror nexus is grossly understudied. This study will focus on the ‘push’ factors from an individual’s social environment that may initiate a change towards radicalisation and also the ‘pull’ factors that may attract criminals towards jihadist networks. Similarly, this study will discuss the potential rationale for terrorist organisations as to what would specifically draw these groups to seek out criminals, seemingly in contrast with their ideology.

### *Prisons*

It is well known within the study of terrorism that prisons are influential environments. Almost every radical and militant movement in modern history has a well-documented connection to state prisons. Prisons are often incorporated into the narratives of radical and militant movements across all religious and political spectrums and are frequently reflected upon as pivotal turning points in the histories of their movements. The way individuals were treated in prison and the experiences they had often came to be focal areas for campaigns, frequently influencing the attitudes of others towards violence against the state. Harvey Kushner argued that Al Qaeda’s main recruitment grounds are based within Western prisons due to their relatively lax practices.<sup>49</sup> The prison system has often been depicted in the media as a form of ‘university’ or ‘finishing school’ for terrorists.<sup>50</sup>

The nature of the prison environment houses vulnerability, often leading to a hotbed for radicalisation, yet have also been known to offer peaceful transformation. The link between the crime-terror nexus and prisons is obvious. Housing both criminals, terrorists and crossovers of

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<sup>48</sup> Roy, Oliver. 2017. "Who Are The New Jihadis?". *The Guardian*, 2017.

<sup>49</sup> Harvey Kushner (with Bart Davis), *Holy War on the Home Front* (New York: Sentinel, 2004).

<sup>50</sup> See ‘Al Qaeda’s British Propagandists on Trial’, Jihadwatch, April 2007; available at <http://www.jihadwatch.org/2007/04/al-qaedas-british-propagandists-on-trial.html>

the two, the guarantee for the paths of these individuals to cross is a prime opportunity for terrorists to radicalise and recruit. Terrorists are dissimilar to traditional interpretations of offenders. Often, they will utilise their incarceration to rally outside support, influence other prisoners and even attempt to emulate operational command structures.<sup>51</sup> The role of prisons in the crime-terror nexus across Europe will be explored further in this thesis.

*Development of Skills, Activity Appropriation and Integration*

Various transnational criminal groups can create a form of nexus by adopting each other's approaches to achieve their separate motives. In order to do this, groups can influence each other without the need to make direct contact. Shelley and Picarelli refers to this as 'activity appropriation'.<sup>52</sup> This behaviour can also be exhibited in terrorist groups, most likely in methods of fundraising. This may be appropriating ways of money laundering, ideas for illegal enterprise or other operational capabilities. This can work both ways as criminal groups have been historically known to adopt violent tactics commonly used by terrorist groups in order to reinforce their economic strategy.<sup>53</sup>

Activity appropriation refers to a criminal gang or terrorist group acquiring in-house capabilities, whether it may be to help further their operational strategy or to acquire funding through criminal methods. This can be achieved without direct collaboration. Integration refers to when two or more groups socially crossover as a means of learning the required expertise. Historically, most cases of appropriation originate in terrorism, particularly in the European theatre. This is predominantly due to the lack of state sponsorship leading to the need to self-funded enterprises.<sup>54</sup> Appropriation and integration are theoretically a different connection to a simple alliance. Securing a skill set to take control of their own operational command increases organisational capacity and eradicates the integral dangers that come with alliances. The threat of distrust, betrayal, altercations over priorities and the possibility of creating competitors diminish. If an alliance branches off and form competitive rivals with insider knowledge on

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<sup>51</sup> Peter Neumann. 2010. "Prisons and Terrorism Radicalisation and De-Radicalisation in 15 Countries". London: International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence.

<sup>52</sup> Louise Shelley and John Picarelli, "Methods Not Motives: Implications of the Convergence of International Organised Crime and Terrorism," *Police Practice and Research: An International Journal* 3(4) (2002), Page 305.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid

<sup>54</sup> Tamara Makarenko. 2012. "Europe's Crime-Terror Nexus: Links between Terrorist and Organised Crime Groups in the European Union". Brussels: European Parliament: Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs.

operations, skill level and contacts, this could prove fatal to the success of both groups.<sup>55</sup> This study will aim to investigate if any type of strategic relationship exists between any groups in Europe and modern Jihadist groups.

### *Financing*

The operational costs of running sophisticated terrorist organisations can be extremely high. Groups with a classic hierarchal structure, such as the Taliban, regularly make the list of the wealthiest terrorist organisations in the world. According to Forbes, the Taliban generates around \$800 million per annum.<sup>56</sup> Such large cash flows create million-dollar budgets to maintain expenses essential to fulfilling strategic goals, such as weapons and military operations, salaries, travel, attack materials, propaganda, training camps, and family welfare for dead or imprisoned fighters. In Afghanistan, the Taliban functions through similar means as other groups that often evolve into insurgencies.<sup>57</sup> The more territory seized the more revenue sources under their command including taxing residents and commandeering local business and resources such as oil fields. On the other hand, the more controlled territory gained, the more expenditure increases for local infrastructure such as schools and hospitals, and additional expenses incurred as a result. The real money maker for the Taliban that generates hundreds of millions of dollars a year comes in the form of the infamous drug trade, profiting from farming opium for the manufacture of heroin.<sup>58</sup>

In Europe, even though many jihadist groups have ties to organisations abroad, terrorist cells are largely autonomous from their mammoth budgets available to their centralised counterparts. European cells are decreasingly financially dependent on their affiliated centralised group structures such as the Islamic State's central leadership or al-Qaeda's long accumulated wealth.<sup>59</sup> The most recent trend in jihadist terrorism in Europe is low-cost attacks that do not necessitate large quantities of financial support. Jihadist groups such as al-Qaeda have been

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<sup>55</sup> Tamara Makarenko. 2012. "Europe's Crime-Terror Nexus: Links between Terrorist and Organised Crime Groups in the European Union". Brussels: European Parliament: Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs.

<sup>56</sup> Forbes. 2018. "The Richest Terror Organisations in The World", 2018. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesinternational/2018/01/24/the-richest-terror-organizations-in-the-world/#78059a277fd1>.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Chris Dishman. 2001. "Terrorism, Crime, and Transformation". *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 24 (43).

promoting self-financing cheap, high impact attacks on their Western followers for several years. The Islamic State has taken a similar approach, endorsing loosely-structured networks and cheaper alternatives to their European supporters while they concentrated their own resources on establishing and expanding their former attempted caliphate in Syria and Iraq.<sup>60</sup>

A study by Emilie Oftedal<sup>61</sup> examined the financing of jihadi terrorist cells in Europe. Focusing on 40 jihadist plots between 1994 and 2013, she found that around 75% gained at a portion of their funding through legal sources. Despite elements of legality, she found that criminality significantly contributed to financing with over 40% of the plot funding being derived from the proceeds of crime. Some of the most devastating attacks such as Mohammed Merah's attacks in the South of France were funded almost entirely by activities outside of the law. Numerous foreign fighters across Europe have funded their travels to Syria and the Middle East through various forms of petty crimes in addition to private donations and fraudulent activity.<sup>62</sup> Keeping financial barriers to entry low means that involvement in terrorist activities is more and more accessible. It is unsurprising that individuals with criminal knowledge would most likely aid the effectiveness of terrorist financing. This thesis will aim to expand upon how criminality relates to the financing of European jihadi cells.

### *Criticisms*

The institutional, organisational and social interpretations of the crime-terror nexus will provide a basic framework for analysis for this research. Despite there being some extremely useful conceptualisations of the nexus available, the crime-terror nexus and its implications appear to be understudied or dismissed as too broad. The study of the intersection of the two separate issues appears to be limited to only a few key scholars. Furthermore, case studies appear to be restricted to outside of Europe where the traditional link between crime syndicates and terrorist organisations are more overt. The same classic case studies are repeatedly used to make similar points. The landscape of terrorist methodology, financing and recruitment are changing across Europe. Recent emerging evidence of publicly available information on the escalating attacks in the last few years does not quite fit the mould of some of the more traditional understandings of the nexus. While the conventional crime-terror nexus is still a valuable concept, there are new dynamics to consider that fall outside of the boundaries. There is extremely limited academic research available on the European nexus during and after the rise of Islamic State

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<sup>60</sup> Rajan Basra and Peter R. Neumann, "Criminal Pasts, Terrorist Futures: European Jihadists and the New Crime-Terror Nexus", *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol 10, No 6, 2016, pp. 25-40.

<sup>61</sup> Oftedal, Emilie. 2015. "The Financing of Jihadi Terrorist Cells in Europe". FFI Report. Oslo: Norwegian Defence Research Establishment.

<sup>62</sup> Rajan Basra and Peter R. Neumann. 2016. 27.

affiliation and the modern era of foreign fighters travelling to join the fight in Iraq and Syria. This is likely due to the notorious scarcity of available, reliable empirical data, though as more time passes and convictions occur, the more information is increasingly available in the open-source arena. Newly available information leaves the modus operandi of modern jihadist groups to be explored from a different perspective.

Derived from a review of the literature, several preconceived notions about the crime-terror nexus and western terrorism studies will be disregarded in this study to allow an unrestricted approach to analysis, free from assumptions. The first of these is the classic narrative that many terrorists are not poor and uneducated, but raised in the middle to upper-class background, and are therefore unlikely to have previously exhibited low-level criminal behaviour. The supposition that most terrorists were somewhat wealthy and educated was popularised in the 1980s and 1990s, particularly gaining traction due to the stark affluence of numerous educated al-Qaeda members and infamously, the son of a billionaire Saudi construction tycoon, Osama Bin Laden.<sup>63</sup>

From the 1990s onwards particularly in Britain and across Europe, university campuses have been considered to play a crucial role in the development of transnational jihadist networks. The recruitment of western educated students provides terrorist networks with a pool highly motivated, competent and often impressionable young Muslims. Whether they are home-grown actors or have travelled from abroad, those with EU passports or student visas are enabled to roam borders freely.<sup>64</sup> There are many high-profile cases in the UK where the perpetrators of a terrorist attack have attended schooling in Britain. The two leaders of the 2005 London bombings, Mohammed Siddique Khan and Shehzad Tanweer, both previously attended Leeds Metropolitan University.<sup>65</sup> In 2015, a total of 16 British medics who had studied in Sudan joined IS, many who have died in combat.<sup>66</sup> The string of similar patterns of radicalised young people and students across Europe raised in far from impoverished backgrounds shows that these cases are not outliers, but undeniably a trend of skilled and resourceful recruits with the aptitude mobilise and successfully organise sophisticated terror plots.

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<sup>63</sup> Nelly Lahoud. 2010. "The Strengths and Weaknesses of Jihadist Ideology". *Ideology, Rules, & Edicts* 3 (10): 1.

<sup>64</sup> James Brandon. 2011. "British Universities Continue to Breed Extremists". *CTC Sentinel* 4 (1): 6.

<sup>65</sup> The Guardian. 2005. "Three Cities, Four Killers", 2005.

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2005/jul/17/july7.uksecurity>.

<sup>66</sup> Daniel Sandford. 2015. "UK Medical Student 'Recruited For IS' At University in Sudan". *BBC*, 2015. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-33502534>.

Due to the emphasis placed on educational institutions and the notion of the middle-class jihadi, this is often the assumed profile when studying terrorism.<sup>67</sup> Through this image, their socio-economic status would rarely be associated with petty crime, and thus any link between crime and terrorism is either understudied or ignored. This research does not aim to dispute the well-documented involvement of bright, young and well-off individuals involved in European jihadist groups. Instead, this research aims to approach newly available information on recent jihadi terrorist attacks in Europe from a fresh perspective to be inclusive of all socio-economic backgrounds and educational levels. Furthermore, this study will not proceed with the assumption that terrorists from wealthier backgrounds are less likely to be involved in criminal behaviour, or that their criminality is mutually exclusive from their terrorist activities.

A further area to consider based on current crime-terror nexus literature is the reality of the amalgamation of crime and terrorist organisations. According to the previously explored institutional framework, many prominent scholars such as Makarenko<sup>68</sup> consider the nexus to exist on a sliding continuum of cooperation, convergence and transformation. This means that at one end of the spectrum, criminal and terrorist groups collaborate in marriages of convenience specific to an individual transaction. Nearer the middle, both terrorists and crime syndicates utilise each other's skills to become hybrid criminal-terrorist groups to further their strategic goals. The transformation stage results in almost an exchange of motivations; a terrorist group's financial goals may become almost parallel in importance to their ideological objectives and vice versa with criminal organisations (add another model). Although these models have helped map the field for crime-terror nexus studies, they do not fully reflect the changes in modern Europe that have altered the manner in which terrorist organisations operate.

Elements of the operational strategies of terrorist groups are developing complexities in the current climate. As more information on recent attacks and the backgrounds of the perpetrators are released, the more can be learned from how these organisations are adapting to societal changes and taking advantage of new opportunities.

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<sup>67</sup> Giulio Meotti. 2016. "Islamic Terrorists Not Poor and Illiterate, But Rich and Educated". *Gatestone Institute International Policy Council*, 2016. <https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/9343/terrorism-poverty-despair>.

<sup>68</sup> Tamara Makarenko. 2004. "The Crime-Terror Continuum: Tracing the Interplay between Transnational Organised Crime and Terrorism". *Global Crime* 6 (1): 129-145.



*Regional Idiosyncrasies and the EU*

The nature of the relationship formed between organised crime and terrorism is largely dependent on the geographical characteristics of where the interaction has manifested. There are many factors that influence the dynamics of inter-group relations in different locations. The most common categorisations used when comparing the scope of relationships are different nexuses in conflict-affected or post-conflict states, transitional states and mainly Western democracies. Makarenko<sup>69</sup> states that in (post) conflict zones, political instability and fragmented government control mean that both terrorist and organised crime groups are not inherently loyal to the state and thus, the long-term ramifications of affiliation are not as prevalent when weighing up the risk-benefit ratio. In transitional states, corruption, porous borders, and inadequate law enforcement have historically primed the conditions for the emergence of hybrid groups that simultaneously prioritise both political motivations and profit generation, such as the KLA and the Albanian mafia in the 90s who often shared recruitment bases.<sup>70</sup>

In Europe and other Western democracies, the nexus primarily exists on an operational plane, largely focused on terrorist networks financially benefitting from criminal endeavours. The consequences of the interplay between the spheres of crime and terror are unpredictable and poorly understood, posing a challenging security threat. There is very limited evidence that implies organised crime groups use terrorist tactics to achieve influence or reach strategic goals. The absence of overt terrorist tactics in use by crime groups is thought to be attributed to the relative economic and political stability present in E.U. member-states. Considering this, the European theatre can be regarded as a unique manifestation of the crime-terror nexus that does not fit the typical moulds shaped by instability and sustained conflict cycles that the crime-terror interactions are commonly associated with. This often means that the operational environments that crime-terror interaction thrives in within European countries are riddled with complexities and go beyond straightforward alliances.<sup>71</sup> This thesis will attempt to decipher some of the more unclear links between crime and terror present in modern Europe and establish if and how developments in the interplay have strayed from traditional understandings of the nexus from a social perspective.

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<sup>69</sup> Tamara Makarenko. 2012. "Europe's Crime-Terror Nexus: Links between Terrorist and Organised Crime Groups in the European Union". Brussels: European Parliament: Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs. Page 18.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid

## Methodology

The purpose of this research was to reflect on elements of modern jihadi terrorism in Europe, how any patterns fit into traditional understandings of the crime-terror nexus, and to analyse any emerging phenomena through a social or criminological theoretical lens. This study aimed to explore this topic through a case study of recent incidents of terrorist activity across Europe in order to investigate any correlations or connections to the nexus. In an attempt to understand any potential factors, various social theories were utilised as a theoretical framework to underpin analysis. To achieve the intended research aims and develop understandings of the crime-terror nexus, a case study was the favoured method in order to provide a quality and detailed contribution to this understudied field.

### *Case study Research*

In essence, a case study can act as a form of empirical enquiry, investigating phenomena within its real-life context. This is especially poignant when boundaries between phenomena and context are often not the most coherent.<sup>72</sup> This quintessentially applies to this study, particularly as sceptics doubt the existence of a crime-terror nexus and its meaningfulness as an analytical framework. The intention of this case study is to provide a more in-depth understanding of current manifestations of the crime-terror nexus in its 'real-life' setting, while also challenging theoretical perspectives.

The crime-terror nexus and modern jihadist networks in Europe were selected for analysis in this case study. The nature of the relationship formed between organised crime and terrorism is largely dependent on the geographical characteristics of where the interaction has manifested. There are many factors that influence the dynamics of inter-group relations in different locations. There are stark differences in the shape of the crime-terror nexus between conflict-affected states and Western democracies.<sup>73</sup> In conflict-affected regions, multiple contextual factors such as fragmented governance, political and economic instability and outright violent conflict add fundamental complexities to crime-terror manifestations that deserve to be examined within its own specialised research. Furthermore, although there are many studies on the crime-terror nexus in conflict-affected regions, reliable data can be few and far between due to the restrictions of field research in conflict zones. There can also be language constraints in regard to this particular research as fewer studies are available in different languages.

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<sup>72</sup> Yin, R K. 1994. *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. 2nd ed. Sage. Page 13.

<sup>73</sup> Tamara Makarenko. 2012. "Europe's Crime-Terror Nexus: Links between Terrorist and Organised Crime Groups in the European Union". Brussels: European Parliament: Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs. Page 18.

Year by year, there are more studies released with crime and terrorism data relating to Europe. As more studies started to point towards alleged changes in the relationship between crime and terrorism, the natural focus of this study became Europe. This research pertains particularly to western Europe as the most information is released in this region. Despite this, the research aimed to be inclusive of as many countries as possible with data restrictions. An interesting continuation of this study that could be developed by others could be to analyse the crime-terror nexus in other regions through the perspective of social theory and compare the differences and similarities and what that may inform the research about the importance of contextual factors.

As noted throughout, information pertaining to this particular topic is few and far between at times, particularly empirical data. The lack of empirical data available is one of the factors that explains why the study was not narrowed down to a specific country within Europe. This may be regarded by some as a limitation to the study, but the relationship between organised crime and terrorism is transnational and thus, restricting the study to remain within the boundaries of state borders would be irrespective to the nature of the interplay. Although the research fully acknowledges that cultural and social variants affect the contextual circumstances of the data in each country, it is argued that the emerging patterns across Europe call for interstate analysis. Many multi-state institutions across Europe such as Europol and the European Union aim to tackle both crime and terrorism separately on a continental scale. Therefore, this study felt appropriate to approach the research from a Europe-wide perspective.

Once case studies were determined as the method of choice, the next step in the planning process was to determine what type of case study was best suited to the research question. Stake describes two types of case study: the intrinsic case study and the instrumental case study.<sup>74</sup> An intrinsic case study depicts a trait or problem to draw attention to the specifics of the case itself rather than being illustrative of a wider message. In contrast, an instrumental study provides more of an insight into a wider issue. The instrumental approach was adopted in this study as the intricacies of the case took a supporting role to facilitate an understanding of the wider picture of the nexus. The research aimed to provide a narrative still but focus on explanation rather than description. This is markedly important in explorations of areas like this where existing knowledge is often limited.<sup>75</sup> A postmodern perspective could argue that description is the limit in research as all interpretations are equally valid, and the environment is so complex

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<sup>74</sup> R.E. Stake. 1994. "Case Studies". In *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage. Page 237.

<sup>75</sup> P Darke, G Shanks, and M Broadbent. 1998. "Successfully Completing Case Study Research: Combining Rigour, Relevance and Pragmatism". *Information Systems Journal* 8 (4): 275.

that prediction and causality are irrelevant.<sup>76</sup> While it is acknowledged that the terrorism and crime are both extremely complicated phenomena dependent on a multitude of factors, this study will take the opposing view that speculating on causality is not redundant but in fact necessary if governments and institutions aim to develop strategies to counter threats. The aim of this study was not to provide a definitive insight or to define causality as this is rarely possible. The objective was to offer alternative perspectives to be assessed in addition to wider research.

*Document analysis and Review of Existing Literature:*

Document analysis was the form of the systematic qualitative procedure utilised in this study. This method of continually reviewing, assessing and interpreting data was used to gain a better understanding of nexus in Europe. Multiple documents were examined in order to expand upon, corroborate and contextualise each information set. For each document, it was acknowledged that the information was curated within a specific context, and thus subject to outside societal, political and cultural influences present at that time.

The types of documents used in this study were mostly derived from government and institutional reports, journal articles, newspaper articles and speeches. The data used from each was made up of primary and secondary data. To narrow the net of the vast records of information, a preliminary search was pursued to aid the identification of keywords that would determine which sources would yield the greatest quality selection. This was informed by the review of nexus literature. Using a couple of basic keywords such as 'crime' and 'terrorism', a cursory review of academic search engines returned vast information which could then assisted in identifying patterns and what datasets were available.

Document sampling was approached in a systematic format. A log of information listed which key terms were used and what searches returned certain results. From this log, a list of inclusionary and exclusionary criteria was developed to help reduce irrelevant data. The first parameter taken into consideration was the geographical representation of each document. Most academic articles pertaining to manifestations of the crime-nexus are focussed on the Middle East and Africa. This is usually because the nexus takes its most overt form in conflict-affected areas and states with less stable governance. There are considerably fewer comparisons available relative to the European theatre, making it simpler to narrow down the search. For institutional and government documents, European Union reports and other interstate open-source databases were scanned. Hundreds of news sources were also examined from many

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<sup>76</sup> Martin Kilduff, and Ajay Mehra. 1997. "Postmodernism and Organizational Research". *The Academy of Management Review* 22 (2): 453.

nations using online translation methods. Another preliminary parameter targeted the age of the documents. One of the criticisms of current crime-terror examinations identified in the initial review of literature was the dated examples used in many studies, mostly from the eighties. This study sought the most current representations of the phenomena in question. Therefore, the time scale of data used was limited to 5-7 years, roughly corresponding with the apparent rise in jihadist related terrorist attacks in Western Europe.

As the study aimed to assess the nexus of an individual, group, and organisational level, search terms relating to the different stages made for additional considerations. To account for this, some inclusion terms such as known terrorist group names were added to gather data at the organisational level. For information on individuals, the search started with researching individual acts of terrorism and terrorist activity in recent years and then worked backwards from there. The information came from sources such as international news outlets, the Global Terrorism Database<sup>77</sup>, and the RAND Database of Worldwide Terrorism Incidents<sup>78</sup>.

Following supplementing the search with inclusionary terms, exclusionary criteria were also affixed to the search. Adding exclusions aided in narrowing the list of documents down to the final sample based on topic and content relevancy. In Europe, there are various branches of active terrorist organisations in operation. Initial searches hailed comparisons from the Irish Republican Army and various other separatist movements. As this study focussed specifically on jihadist-related terrorism, content focused on other terrorist organisations were omitted unless relevant, though this could prove an interesting area of future research. To organise and manage the document sample and help structure the study, a table was developed to organise the documents by key demographic. The documents were listed in order by title and source. The documents were then grouped together and annotated under separate headings of 'institutional', 'organisational' and 'social' to assemble in order of their relationship to each other.

### *Coding and Categorising*

The documents were then assessed through inductive coding. A sample of two documents from each level of analysis, institutional, organisational and social were selected. The documents were then skimmed, and line-by-line to determine the most appropriate codes that would inform the research. The open-coding process was loosely informed by the initial review of literature.

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<sup>77</sup> "Global Terrorism Database". 2018. National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism. <https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/>.

<sup>78</sup> "RAND Database of Worldwide Terrorism Incidents". 2018. *RAND National Security Research Division*. Accessed January 3. <https://www.rand.org/nsrd/projects/terrorism-incidents.html>.

This method established an initial codebook that could be applied to the rest of the sample. The codes were then organised by categories and subcategories. Firstly, the codes were organised by relationship and then subcategorised for relevancy. For the organisational level, some codes included 'arms trade', 'counterfeiting' and 'cooperation'. For the group level, codes such as 'crime ring', 'group relationships' and 'networks' were utilised. At the individual level, codes such as 'education', 'religion' and 'individual criminality' were identified. In the more focused coding stage, a worksheet was used to facilitate data extraction. This helped manage the information into organised categories and ensured systematic analysis. The use of the worksheet facilitated a more pragmatic approach of coding the full sample whilst still allowing for the inductive emergence of new codes. This also allowed for a revision of existing codes based on the data.

### *Thematic analysis*

Throughout the coding and categorising phase, the coded data was constantly reviewed in search of recognisable patterns. Thematic analysis was used to link data into themes that informed the study of the current state of the nexus. For example, identified patterns in intergroup cooperative behaviour helped provide a picture of how where some instances lie on Makarenko's sliding continuum<sup>79</sup>. Patterns in individuals who have been involved in terrorist activity that previously spent time in incarceration contributed to an exploration of environmental factors in individual radicalisation. Once any themes relating to the crime-terror nexus have been established, the most poignant information will be weighed against social theoretical understandings including rational choice theory and social psychological perspectives.

### *The Use of Theory*

Grounded theory supporters such as Glaser et al.<sup>80</sup> may argue that theory acts as a contaminating influence in research. Conversely, scholars such as Walsham<sup>81</sup> disagree with this approach and state that informed and critical use of theory can prove useful. While Walsham accepts that there are biasing effects of using theory, they argue that multiple theories should be treated as a 'scaffold' to be removed after its purpose is served. They argue that this helps avoid tunnel

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<sup>79</sup> Tamara Makarenko. 2004. "The Crime-Terror Continuum: Tracing the Interplay between Transnational Organised Crime and Terrorism". *Global Crime* 6 (1): 129-145.

<sup>80</sup> Barney Glaser., Anselm L. Strauss, and Elizabeth Strutzel. 1968. "The Discovery of Grounded Theory; Strategies for Qualitative Research". *Nursing Research* 17 (4): 364.

<sup>81</sup> Geoff Walsham. 1995. "Interpretive Case Studies in IS Research: Nature and Method". *European Journal of Information Systems* 4: 74-81.

vision whereby the researcher only sees the theory and is blind to new perspectives. From an interpretive perspective, there are no correct or incorrect theories. The primary function of theoretical literature in this case is to provoke thought and to aid in the interpretation of complex social situations. The motivation for the use of theory in this study is to examine an initial theoretical framework which takes into account previous knowledge whilst providing a theoretical basis to inform analysis. This is the reasoning for the use of multiple theories in this research. Social factors were a prominent theme in initial research and the field was lacking in theoretical analysis. The research did not aim to compare theories or decipher what theories should be used in future study, the only intention was to explore the themes from various perspectives in order to expand the field. The various theories were incorporated into the analysis based on relevance. The theories selected in this study were rational choice theory, social psychological perspectives and strain theory. Rational choice theory was selected to represent logical thought and methodological individualism. Various social psychological perspectives were utilised to represent micro-level theories while strain theory provided a macro-level stance. While these may appear to be competing theories, in some instances the theoretical analysis reached similar conclusions. Rational choice theory can appear an aggravator of the other two perspective, though in instances throughout the research, it could be argued that the rational choice in particular scenarios could be a result of particular social stressors. Regardless, a theoretical exploration provided the study with various interesting perspectives that could be utilised by policy-makers and authorities in order to address the multi-faceted and challenging threats presented by the crime-terror nexus in Europe.

#### *Rational Choice Theory*

Rational choice theory has been sporadically used throughout the study of terrorism as an alternative approach to conceptualisation. The mainstream variant of rational choice theory assumes that individuals have the “rational capacity, time and emotional detachment necessary to choose a best course of action” in any situation that requires a decision.<sup>82</sup> The theory assumes that individuals act out of self-interest and will favour any pathway that will produce personally beneficial results. This feeds into an idea frequently discussed in political science and in social sciences of ‘maximising utility’ from any given scenario.<sup>83</sup>

This approach contradicts the social psychological perspectives of the determinist, positivist criminology scholars who attempt to explain delinquency by identifying comparative psychological, sociological, political and biological traits between criminal and non-criminal

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<sup>82</sup> David Marsh, and Gerry Stoker. 1995. *Theory and Methods in Political Science*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. Page 79.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

groups. The idea that individualistic decisions can be considered as ‘rational’ assumes strategic thinking and that decision-making processes involve analysis, calculation, and evaluation from a subjective perspective.<sup>84</sup> The concept of the ‘choice’ bolsters the position some take whereby criminals consider and make informed decisions. Individuals invest in criminal endeavours if they anticipate that the rewards exceed the benefits they may obtain through alternative channels, whether that be legal or non-legal.<sup>85</sup>

The rational choice theory approach can be considered to be intertwined with an element of phenomenology, as the concept of criminal and even terrorist behaviour is infamously dependent on subjective interpretations of ‘reality’, which is fundamentally unique to the individual.<sup>86</sup> Every scenario can provoke different reactions in people as each individual perspective can be shaped by multiple variables such as: opportunities, social bonds, material deprivation and religious beliefs. This can help explain inconsistencies where a person may opt for criminal behaviour in one instance yet reject it in another scenario. It also sheds light on why groups of people in similar situations may exhibit differing behaviours.

Rational choice theory and methodological individualism has been adapted to almost all disciplines of political science, sociology, philosophy, microeconomics and has occasionally been used as a theoretical lens in terrorism studies. Anderton and Carter<sup>87</sup> have long argued that “when rigorously applied, rational choice theory can help clarify the discipline and study of terrorism”. This theory is also commonly used throughout criminological research. It can be reasonably assumed that both operationally instrumental individuals in terrorist or criminal organisations seek to maximise utility when the opportunity presents itself. Given their shared quality of unconventional methodology, these groups exploit the resources that are available to them in a way that maximizes their returns. Where organised crime can be considered a continuation of business through criminal methods, terrorism is a continuation of politics by way of violence in accordance with their various motivations.<sup>88</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, where rational choice theory is utilised, actors will be considered as rational actors.

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<sup>84</sup> Simon Perry and Badi Hasisi. 2014. "Rational Choice Rewards and The Jihadist Suicide Bomber". *Terrorism and Political Violence* 27 (1): 56.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Charles H. Anderton, and John R. Carter. 2005. "On Rational Choice Theory and the Study of Terrorism". *Defence and Peace Economics* 16 (4): Page 275.

<sup>88</sup> Phil Williams. 2007. "Strategy in The Contemporary World: Combating Terrorism and Transnational Organised Crime". In *Strategy in the Contemporary World: An Introduction to Strategic Studies*, 2nd ed. New York: Oxford University. Page 195.



Perhaps the most clear-cut connection to rational choice theory is at the organisational level of the crime-terror nexus. Organised crime leaders and syndicates as a collective are motivated by the potential rewards from illegal activities that in many cases exceed what can be earned through legitimate business endeavours. They utilise a broad range of tactics to maximise profits including extortion, violence and corruption. Illegal strategies to eliminate market competition to continue their operations successfully can be considered rational to guarantee their survival and to reduce risk.<sup>89</sup> From the perspective that illegal income capabilities can often surpass prospective income generated through legal channels, especially for individuals who do not have access to lucrative opportunities, running or participating in an organised crime group can be seen as a way to ‘maximise utility’ given the choices available. Particularly in countries affected by low income and poverty, income generated in a month through illegal income can equate to a year’s salary through conventional methods. Through this viewpoint, it is easy to agree with those that argue illegitimate activities can be regarded as a rational choice for financial and operational survival.

Similarly, both leaders within criminal and terrorist leadership both utilise risk management strategies and employ various techniques to achieve their end goal, portraying them as a rational actor that make calculated motive-based decisions.<sup>90</sup> Where prominent members of organised crime gangs can be considered a form of entrepreneur operating within an underground economy, terrorists can be seen as a brand of ‘political entrepreneur’.<sup>91</sup> Some argue that particularly for terrorist leaders, other methods can be used as a tool to achieve their own goals. Gupta takes the standpoint that often religion and ethnic nationalism can be manipulated to maximise utility and ramp up membership and further their agenda.<sup>92</sup> Makarenko has previously argued that terrorists have exploited a “vener of Islam” in order to expand their operative network to work towards their motivations, which can often be more political than religious.<sup>93</sup>

Terrorist attacks often seem random and indiscriminate. This is usually far from the truth as attacks can be meticulously planned months and even years in advance. It would be in the

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<sup>89</sup> Louise Shelley and John Picarelli, “Methods Not Motives: Implications of the Convergence of International Organised Crime and Terrorism,” *Police Practice and Research: An International Journal* 3(4) (2002), Pg. 306.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Dipak Gupta. 2004. In *Exploring Roots of Terrorism*, 7. London: Routledge. Page 7.

<sup>92</sup> Dipak Gupta. 2004. In *Exploring Roots of Terrorism*, Page 10.

<sup>93</sup> Tamara Makarenko. 2012. "Europe's Crime-Terror Nexus: Links between Terrorist and Organised Crime Groups in the European Union". Brussels: European Parliament: Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs.

interest of a rational terrorist actor to portray attacks as random in order to achieve the goal of intimidation and terrorising the intended population. Attacks are premeditated with targets selected based on maximum output. Regardless of whether the intended result is media coverage, fear mongering, or maximum casualties, all outcomes are considered during the planning phase of attacks.<sup>94</sup> However, the rationality of terrorists has been the source of much debate. Although it is plain to see how leaders of terrorist organisations used supposed rational choices to benefit the organisation and thus, themselves, it can prove challenging to argue the case of suicide bombs as a rational choice for an individual to make. Arguments about religious fundamentalism and collective action also contribute to the wider debate and how rational choice theory can be applied at the individual level. This thesis touches on various sides of this argument and approaches rational choices theory at a wider organisational level between criminal groups and terrorist organisations and also on an individual level as to why someone might choose to interact with both crime and terrorism.

Regarding rational choice at an individual level, it is often difficult to argue that acts such as suicide bombings could ever be considered the ‘rational’ choice. This can be explained by Clarke and Cornish’s notion of ‘limited rationality’<sup>95</sup>. When the decision making is intrinsically affected by imperfect conditions and thus, the decision-making process is not optimal. Individuals who contemplate suicide bombings often act rashly and can be heavily influenced by others as well as information constraints. Through this standpoint and for the sake of analysis, suicide bombers and terrorist’s actions are rational when considering the opportunities and limitations presented to them. This feeds more into the discussion of ‘thin’ and ‘broad’ rationality. As a concept, ‘thin’ rationality is a correlation between the beliefs or goals of an individual versus their eventual actions. If a suicide bomber is under the impression that martyrs are entitled to posthumous rewards, it may appear to be a rational choice to consider martyrdom. Outsiders of Islamic fundamentalism could argue that because there is no solid evidence involved the afterlife narrative, the decision of martyrdom could not possibly constitute as rational judgement, i.e. ‘broad’ rationality. Thus, a rational choice does not have to pertain to any apparent evidence and rational judgement is not mutually exclusive to belief systems.

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<sup>94</sup> Louise Shelley and John Picarelli, “Methods Not Motives: Implications of the Convergence of International Organised Crime and Terrorism,” *Police Practice and Research: An International Journal* 3(4) (2002), Pg. 309.

<sup>95</sup> Ronald Clarke and Derek B. Cornish, “Rational Choice,” in R. Paternoster and R. Bachman, eds., *Explaining Criminals and Crime: Essays in Contemporary Criminology Theory* (Los Angeles: Roxbury, 2001), 23–42.

Most applications of rational choice theory in terrorism studies pertains to decision making within the upper echelons of terrorist network hierarchies. Recent information implies that terrorist networks have a looser, more decentralised structure and thus the focus shifts towards the individual and smaller groups. This research will review modern trends in the crime-terror nexus and analyse them through the lens of rational choice theory at both the institutional, organisational level and the individual level in response to new challenges to traditional thinking.

*Social Psychology Perspective*

Social psychological perspectives regard crime and terrorism as a social phenomenon. The origins of applying the social psychological approach to either crime or terrorism stemmed from pathological and individualistic accounts attached to the presumption that criminals and terrorists have intrinsically different characteristics to the ‘normal’ population. Despite best efforts, there has been little supporting evidence to suggest a terrorist or criminal personality typology and the concept has not typically been backed by scholars. While there is a higher presence of mental disorder among prison populations, the vast majority of crimes are committed by individuals who are not known to have shown any outward signs of psychopathy. The apparent ‘normality’ of terrorists is more widely accepted in modern research, and as Post – formerly a supporter of the abnormality approach – theorises, “abnormality and psychopathology are not useful in understanding terrorist psychology or behaviour”.<sup>96</sup>

Conversely, other approaches attempt to bridge the gap at the macro-level and relate wider societal conditions that may encourage the processes of individuals entering into crime or terrorism. Although concepts such as frustration-aggression and relative deprivation are worthwhile analytical concepts, their foundations are unsteady when critics ask why despite similar experiences, some stick to social norms of law-abiding behaviour while others turn to terrorism and criminality. These theories often encounter challenges when confronted with specificity and environmental determinism.<sup>97</sup> The aim of using the social psychology lens and studying the social interactions that exist between criminals and terrorists is not to identify which social conditions reign dominant in the radicalisation process or to predict which individuals are destined to stray from the normative fold. At the preliminary level, the function of this analytical perspective in this research is to attempt to shed some light on the key instruments of criminalisation and radicalisation and how groups and individuals function at a

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<sup>96</sup> Jerrold M. Post. 2005. "When Hatred Is Bred in The Bone: Psycho-Cultural Foundations of Contemporary Terrorism". *Political Psychology* 26 (4): 636.

<sup>97</sup> Marc Sageman. 2004. *Understanding Terror Networks*. Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania. Page 95.

generalised level. This will potentially help highlight any necessary conditions either within a group setting or on an individual level that may help provide an understanding of how an individual may become involved and continue to engage in these illicit activities. Mullins outlined three areas of social psychological thinking that share similarities between the fields of crime and terrorism: social influence, organisation and identity.<sup>98</sup> These overlapping and intertwined areas will be examined further in relation to recent trends in the European Jihadist crime-terror nexus.

### *Social Influence*

Social circles and peer groups have long been understood to have some sort of swaying power over individual decisions. These ideas are often packaged under theories of differential association<sup>99</sup> and social learning<sup>100</sup> within academia. In both terrorism and criminality research, peer groups have been found to be strong competitors to schools, communities and even families for social influence over beliefs and behaviours. It is accepted throughout terrorism research that terrorism and radicalisation are irrefutably group processes, attributed to a variety of factors such as the significance of social support systems and the requisite of outside help due to the difficulties of the task or the need for extra sets of hands to fulfil an objective. The weight of peer interaction in the processes of terrorism is hardly downplayed in terrorism research, positioning the terrorist activity alongside organised crime as a form of co-offending may inspire further comprehensions of the types of interactions that take place. However, social influence is very rarely discussed in crime-terror research, and this aspect is explored further in this thesis.

### *Social Organisation*

Social organisation refers to structural make-up which can influence how members of collectives and syndicates react to each other and to outsiders of the group. As per the original understandings of the crime-terror nexus, initial understandings of terrorist structures point to traditional interpretations of criminal networks. Both were originally understood to have vertical, hierarchical arrangements with a recognised chain of command and enjoying relative consistency. More modern research has suggested that this is in fact no longer the case and that

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<sup>98</sup> Sam Mullins. 2009. "Parallels Between Crime and Terrorism: A Social Psychological Perspective". *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 32 (9): 811-830. doi:10.1080/10576100903109776. Page 820.

<sup>99</sup> Robert L. Burgess, and Ronald L. Akers. 1966. "A Differential Association-Reinforcement Theory of Criminal Behaviour". *Social Problems* 14 (2): 128-147.

<sup>100</sup> Akers, Ronald L. 1973. "Deviant Behaviour: A Social Learning Approach." (1973): 24-41. Harvard.

a large number of both criminal and terrorist groups operate under flexible, loosely affiliated, semi-independent networks. Centralised forms of networks could no longer be relied on by groups such as Al-Qaeda after 9/11 when counterterrorism measures forced groups underground so that overt structures became inoperable. This thesis examines the role of crime in modern terrorist group structures from a social perspective.

### *Social Identity*

A sense of identity at an individual and a group level has often been thought to influence individual actions. The importance of certain behaviours to social influence can be understood in terms of role play and identity.<sup>101</sup> Social learning or social modelling theories attest that imitation of certain behaviours can amalgamate into one's own everyday actions.<sup>102</sup> According to these theories, belonging to a certain group can in itself act as a commanding beacon of social identity. Within groups, individual roles and responsibilities can create different dynamics of social influence and the more the individual participates in group activities, the more attuned the individual becomes to their group identity. Particularly with criminal organisations, it is well recognised that a sense of status and a strong collective identity can be pull factors into gang activity, especially for young people. This has also been recognised in some individual's involvement with terrorist groups.<sup>103</sup> The sense of belonging to a group and the impact on individual identity will be explored further in this thesis and will be assessed in relation to individual involvement in the crime-terror nexus.

Ethnic and religious identity can often be self-defining characteristics of both criminal and terrorist groups and can often be the initial instigator for group affiliation and involvement in the group activity. Strong identification with a particular religious or ethnic group can promote empathy for others within the broader group, particularly if an individual feels they are experiencing injustice. This can often project the world-view of an 'us' and 'them' mentality, which separates and dehumanises the supposed 'outsiders', which some argue diminishes the psychological barriers to violence.<sup>104</sup> On a network level, some argue that a strong group identity between members can foster conditions that can lead to groupthink, which can

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<sup>101</sup> Sam Mullins. 2009. "Parallels Between Crime and Terrorism: A Social Psychological Perspective". *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 32 (9): 811-830. doi:10.1080/10576100903109776. Page 820.

<sup>102</sup> Christine Sharon Sellers, Latham T Winfree, and Ronald L Akers. 2012. *Social Learning Theories of Crime*. Farnham: Ashgate.

<sup>103</sup> Andrew Silke. 2008. "Holy Warriors: Exploring the Psychological Processes of Radicalisation". *European Journal of Criminology* 5 (1): 109.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

encourage uncurbed conformity and result in extreme action pathways.<sup>105</sup> Groupthink and social identity are explored further in this thesis within the context of individual participation within crime and terrorism.

Although social and psychological theories are far from absent when studying terrorism and various theories are also used when analysing crime, applications of social theory is barely used at all within the frame of the crime-terror nexus. As the focus of crime-terror literature moves from the organisational to the individual level, it is important to understand new developments in the nexus in relation to socialisation processes including social influence, social identity and social organisation. These ideas are expanded upon further in this thesis. It is valuable to approach this topic through both theories of groupthink and learned behaviour whilst also consulting the perspective of the methodological individualism of rational choice theory in order to gain as much of a holistic understanding as possible. Future research could utilise and compare other social theories and broaden the spectrum to add to this understudied field.

#### *Strain Theory*

Durkheim utilised the classic notion of anomie to explain the way in which the inaccessibility of socially accepted goals and socio-economic circumstances can predict deviant behaviour. Scholars such as Merton<sup>106</sup> discuss strain theory and theorise that a greater emphasis on social goals rather than actual legitimacy of means generates the strain that would cause many to violate socially acceptable established norms. According to Robert Agnew's general strain theory<sup>107</sup>, the primary motivator of crime is negative emotion in accordance loss of a positive stimuli such as the death of a loved one, a life altering negative experience or the inability to reach the desired social goal, for example wealth or status. Individuals who experience either individual or collective strains are more likely to commit crime and take a negative reaction against the source of the stressor. Horgan proposes that various strains can fall under risk factors for being susceptible to radicalisation such as a sense of alienation, disenfranchisement and disconnection to society.

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<sup>105</sup> Tsintsadze-Maass, Eteri, and Richard W. Maass. 2014. "Groupthink and Terrorist Radicalization". *Terrorism and Political Violence* 26 (5): 735-758.

<sup>106</sup> Robert K. Merton. 1938. "Social Structure and Anomie". *American Sociological Review* 3 (5): 672-678.

<sup>107</sup> Robert Agnew. 1992. "Foundation for a General Strain Theory of Crime and Delinquency". *Criminology* 30 (1): 47-88.

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In 2010, Agnew updated his general strain theory to include terrorism<sup>108</sup>, building upon general strain theory and terrorism research. Agnew states that terrorism is a response to collective strains that are high in magnitude and usually associated with individuals in positions of power. These collective strains also contribute to negative feelings such as frustration and anger. Agnew argues that strained collectivity can also provide a sense of social identity that can result in a sense of belonging and collective orientation. Although strain theory has been used in terrorism research before, it is rarely applied to the crime-terror nexus. This study aims to utilise strain theory to examine certain macro-level factors in relation to crime and terrorism.

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<sup>108</sup> Robert Agnew. 2010. "A General Strain Theory of Terrorism". *Theoretical Criminology* 14 (2): 131-153.

## Institutional Crime-Terror Nexus

In Western democracies and particularly in Europe, the nexus is thought to exist on the operational plane for the most part. On this level, the nexus was initially believed to almost exclusively relate to terrorist groups engaging in crime as a source of funding. As the vast majority of European and EU member-states enjoy relative economic and political stability, the use of terror tactics by organised crime syndicates is thought to be a limited circumstance. Furthermore, it can be argued that organised crime groups do not have as many beneficial incentives to adopt terror tactics as it could disturb the societal system in which they thrive, both on a political and an economic level. The relatively stable political and socio-economic environment has equated to the nexus being more concentrated on alliances, activity appropriation in line with Makarenko's analytical framework.<sup>109</sup> From a review of the literature and open-sources, there are two dominant trends outlined that demonstrate the regional trends of the crime-terror nexus in Europe at the operational level which will be explored further in this chapter. Firstly, there is evidence to suggest that strategic, temporary alliances exist between organised crime groups and terrorist cells dotted along Europe's porous borders. Organised crime groups have the infrastructure and means to provide a segue into European markets which in turn allows terrorist organisations the opportunity to finance operations both within Europe and abroad. The second trend relates to the ability of terrorist groups to mimic and replicate criminal tactics which are then used to raise funds for terrorist activity. As this chapter refers to the operational level of cooperation, this chapter will focus on rational choice theory to provide a theoretical unpinning to any trends.

### *Alliances*

According to most literature, alliances or 'marriages of convenience' are the most overt connection between organised crime and terrorism in Europe.<sup>110</sup> Following the aggressive counterterrorism pursuits by international law enforcement after 9/11, the hostile environment for international operations of terrorist groups compelled European cells to self-finance. As previously mentioned, the 2004 Madrid attack was thought to have cost €40,000 to €50,000

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<sup>109</sup> Tamara Makarenko. 2004. "The Crime-Terror Continuum: Tracing the Interplay between Transnational Organised Crime and Terrorism". *Global Crime* 6 (1): 131.

<sup>110</sup> Tamara Makarenko. 2012. "Europe's Crime-Terror Nexus: Links between Terrorist and Organised Crime Groups in the European Union". Brussels: European Parliament: Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs.



after logistical overheads despite initial estimates of €8000<sup>111</sup>. Access to weaponry, migration documentation and stealthy travel are all services offered on the illicit market by organised crime groups in Europe. Alliances can thus be seen as a vital arrangement. In this case, the Italian Camorra are said to have supplied counterfeit documentation in 2004 to the Madrid cell.<sup>112</sup> The 2018 European Terrorism Situation and Trend Report<sup>113</sup> states that in 2017, a major enquiry found that a vast network of Lebanese nationals was facilitating money laundering services for unnamed European organised crime groups. The profits generated were then forwarded on to finance terrorist activity on behalf of the Lebanese Hezbollah's militant wing. Although this example is not classified as European jihadism, it illustrates that cooperation between terrorist networks and organised crime groups has been recently proven.

In 2014 and the years previous, the Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment report (SOCTA) released yearly by Europol stated that the affiliation between terrorist cells and organised crime groups in Europe existed as only a marginal phenomenon in Europe.<sup>114</sup> However, the 2017 SOCTA offers a new perspective, highlighting the involvement of the Brussels and Paris attackers in March 2016 and November 2015 in other serious and organised crimes. The reports allude to their involvement in drug trafficking along with personal contact with organised crime operatives partaking in the illegal sale of weaponry and the manufacture of fraudulent documents.<sup>115</sup>

The European Union has a multitude of exceedingly lucrative trafficking routes between its peripheral neighbours and to other continents which are highly successfully exploited by criminal groups. These routes open up the European market for trade of narcotics, arms and even people. Infamous routes include the eastern European routes continually exploited by Chechen and Russian crime groups, the North African passage into Spain, and perhaps most notably, the Mediterranean route passing through Italy and the Balkans. The security environment in the Balkan theatre has recently raised concerns over its impact on EU

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<sup>111</sup> <sup>111</sup> Tamara Makarenko. 2012. "Europe's Crime-Terror Nexus: Links between Terrorist and Organised Crime Groups in the European Union". Brussels: European Parliament: Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs. Page 21.

<sup>112</sup> Tamara Makarenko, and Michael Mesquita. 2014. "Categorising the Crime-Terror Nexus in the European Union". *Global Crime* 15 (3-4): 263.

<sup>113</sup> Europol. 2018. "European Union Situation and Trend Report 2018". TESAT. Brussels: European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation. Page 11.

<sup>114</sup> Europol. 2014. "EU Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment". SOCTA. Brussels: European Police Office. Page 35.

<sup>115</sup> Europol. 2017. "EU Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment". SOCTA. Brussels: European Police Office. Page 55.

security.<sup>116</sup> Organised crime groups and terrorist actors have been found to cross over geographical boundaries, particularly along the Serbian border with Romania and Macedonia alongside Greek and Turkish state lines. The Western Balkan route was specifically identified by Albania in concerns that terrorists are using smuggling networks established by criminal organisations to enter the European Union.<sup>117</sup> The 2017 SOCTA report also claims that recent investigations have uncovered that terrorists have taken advantage of migrant smuggling networks to allow personnel to enter the European Union.<sup>118</sup>

The functionality of rational choice theory is at its most distinguishable at the institutional level that most crime-terror nexus literature initially refers to, and in this case provides an explanatory analytical frame. The core utility of alliances and marriages of convenience is to embark on courses of action that best serve the strategic goals of both interest parties. If both terrorist and organised crime actors are to be regarded as rational actors, the current trends in the nexus can be seen as a rational response to societal structures and trade demands, as with legitimate business. The illegal transit of goods through covert trafficking routes at Europe's entry and egress points has long been a multi-million-euro exercise, fuelling a booming underground economy across the continent. Since the 2015 migration crisis, the migrant smuggling business has successfully launched a highly lucrative market and criminal syndicates are reaping the benefits. If the primary driver for criminal organisations is profit generation, it would be the rational choice for criminal enterprises to allow the use of their services to terrorists to maximise profit. Irrespective of the intentions, the majority of illegal migrants would likely be void of documentation and it would likely be unclear of the origin of every individual. It would be in the best interest of the enterprise to remain indiscriminate.

To use the Balkans as an example, the prolific transshipment points of trafficking networks are assisted by an influx of regional road traffic flows which facilitates the transit of illegal consignments to move undetected. British jihadists have used the region as a haven to participate in large-scale criminal smuggling operations.<sup>119</sup> It would be the rational choice for terrorist organisations to collaborate with criminal smuggling rings to achieve their goals of

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<sup>116</sup> Europol. 2012. "European Union Situation and Trend Report 2018". TESAT. Brussels: European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation. Page 14.

<sup>117</sup> Tamara Makarenko. 2012. "Europe's Crime-Terror Nexus: Links between Terrorist and Organised Crime Groups in the European Union". Brussels: European Parliament: Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs. Page 25.

<sup>118</sup> Europol. 2017. "EU Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment". SOCTA. Brussels: European Police Office. Page 55.

<sup>119</sup> Europol. 2012. "European Union Situation and Trend Report 2018". TESAT. Brussels: European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation. Page 19.

entering the European theatre undetected by law enforcement. It could also be considered a rational choice that they would use this period of mass migration and follow the trend of undocumented immigration to take advantage of the increase in smuggling services and also to further avoid detection. The 2017 SOCTA report is understandably quick to emphasise that these incidents do not suggest that terrorist groups actively sustain collaborations with organised crime groups who facilitate migrant smuggling.<sup>120</sup> The true significance of this connection is difficult to interpret within the social context as any publicly-made connections between terrorism and the migration crisis in Europe may prove inflammatory to an already highly politically sensitive issue. Regardless of how deep the connection, rational choice theory sheds a light on potential mitigating factors.

Given their previous connections, it is unsurprising that claims of affiliation between the Italian mafia and jihadist groups have surfaced off the back of 2014's rise of the Islamic State group. They have been accused of collaboration on various endeavours including migrants trafficking, oil, drugs and antiquities, and it is easy to see how their suspected joining of forces has proven an attractive topic for news media.<sup>121</sup> In 2017, members of a southern Italian human trafficking ring were arrested and found to be in contact with jihadist group Al-Shabaab, as well as an individual who enabled the entry of two Islamic State fighters into the country.<sup>122</sup> It is not entirely clear how aware the criminals were that they were facilitating jihadist's entry into Italy, but the incident highlighted how boundaries between traffickers and extremists networks can crossover, and that there is potential for criminals to unwittingly participate in the smuggling of jihadists into Europe through their involvement in human trafficking. There have been multiple stories linking the Italian mafia and Islamic State in relation to the illicit trade of synthetic opioids. In 2017, 37 million tramadol pills were seized from a shipment bound for Libya from the port of Genoa, a trade stronghold that holds alleged links with the Islamic State.<sup>123</sup> Although the mafia is known to be the major players in illicit trading from Italy's ports, it is unclear what level of involvement Italian organised crime groups have in this enterprise.

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<sup>120</sup> Europol. 2017. "EU Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment". SOCTA. Brussels: European Police Office. Page 55.

<sup>121</sup> Barbie Nadeau. 2016. "The Mafia Runs Guns for ISIS in Europe". *The Daily Beast*, 2016. 23<sup>rd</sup> March ; Mark Townsend. 2016. "Is Cosa Nostra Now Selling Deadly Assault Weapons To Islamist Terrorist Groups?". *The Guardian*, 2016. 24<sup>th</sup> July.

<sup>122</sup> "Between Bari And Malta Police Operation: "Halawa.Net"". 2017. *Polizia Di Stato*. <http://www.mensilepoliziadistato.it/bari-malta-operazione-polizia-hawala-net/>.

<sup>123</sup> Tom Kington. 2017. "Police Seize 37M Painkilling Pills Bound for Isis". *The Times*, 2017. May 10<sup>th</sup>.

The Italian authorities have stated that while they do not dispute that the potential for collaboration exists, there is no explicit proof to suggest a bona fide mafia-jihadist nexus.<sup>124</sup> Overall, there is little publicly available evidence to suggest the existence of persistent, continual or well-established relationships between the various Italian mafia groups and jihadists. However, this is not indicative of the fact that they do not exist. While on one hand rational choice theory may argue that it would certainly be a lucrative enterprise in accordance with their monetary motives, the looming threat of the inevitable extra attention from Italian and European law enforcement may prove any collaboration detrimental to the wider operation. As such, sustaining a relationship and even any associations with jihadist activity may be considered a red line. Thus, rational choice theory would suggest that in the current climate of more aggressive counterterrorism measure, it may be the rational choice to avoid alliances.

Establishing connections between organised crime and terrorist groups at the European level faces similar challenges as all cross-border law enforcement operations. Most national crime and counterterrorism agencies generally work independently of one another, and therefore encounter intelligence sharing and collaborative limitations. Previous decades showed the more prolific and overt partnerships between groups such as Albanian mafia and the KLA, and the Italian mafia in the previous year with al-Qaeda and the IRA.<sup>125</sup> Although there is some tentative evidence to suggest that there are still some affiliations, the recent string of terrorist attacks in Europe may have rendered jihadist groups operating in European as undesirable business partnerships to organised crime groups and disruptive to operations. The lack of partnerships could also be related to the more decentralised structure of terrorist groups which will be discussed further in the thesis, though alliances may still be formed on a cell by cell basis. Whatever the true nature of the alliances between organised crime syndicates and European based jihadist groups, rational choice theory provides a valuable perspective and allows one to speculate on potential causation which could prove a valuable tool for counterterrorism and anti-organised crime strategies.

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<sup>124</sup> Peter R Neumann and Rajan Basra. 2017. "The Crime-Terror Nexus in Italy And Malta". The Crime-Terror Nexus Country Papers.

<sup>125</sup> <sup>125</sup> Tamara Makarenko. 2012. "Europe's Crime-Terror Nexus: Links between Terrorist and Organised Crime Groups in the European Union". Brussels: European Parliament: Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs. Page 57.

*Appropriation and Skills Transfer*

Appropriation of tactics and the transfer of skills is a second prominent feature of the current crime-terror nexus within European jihadist cells. In this instance, as the use of terror tactics by organised crime groups is relatively rare in Europe, the appropriation will refer to jihadist groups developing in-house capabilities i.e. conducting their own criminal activity in order to progress their agenda or finance themselves. As previously discussed, one of the most significant changes in modern jihad in Europe is the loss of finances from state sponsorship and weakened ties with central command structures following the 9/11 attacks. In recent years, only a small minority of militant Islamist cells have overt connections to al-Qaeda and even the Islamic State. Militants are primarily third generation migrants with no experience or personal connections to the main theatres. Thus, terrorist cells within Europe are often forced to self-finance, leading to crime becoming essential to operational survival.

According to the 2017 EU Situation and Trend Report, up to 40% of terrorist attacks and plots are believed to be funded through crime, namely the sale of counterfeit goods, burglaries, loan fraud and markedly, the illicit drugs trade.<sup>126</sup> The use of street crime and the drugs trade will be discussed further in the study. Terrorist cells using illegal trade as a financing strategy are not a particularly new phenomenon, but in the last few years, jihadists have diversified their funding strategies in response to societal and organisational changes. The procurement of young European jihadists into the recruitment pool, a large margin of whom are computer literate, has pioneered the way for the use of modern technology in both financial services and cybercrime. The use of encrypted and increasingly anonymous financial web applications that allow users to transfer finances have proved an attractive resource for terrorists who seek a financial mechanism irrespective of borders and easily accessible instant small value money transfers.<sup>127</sup> This service has increasingly reduced the necessity for money laundering enterprises and the need for outside organisations to move money.

Although jihadists groups use online social networks to spread their message, their ability to launch cyber-attacks is thought to be fairly limited. The lack of any significant cyber-attacks in Europe is perhaps indicative of a lack of technical skill within cells. A few cyber-terrorist groups have surfaced over the past few years, such as the ISIS-affiliated hackers who targeted the websites of the National Health Service in Britain and displayed grisly Syrian civil war

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<sup>126</sup> Europol. 2017. "European Union Situation and Trend Report 2018". TESAT. Brussels: European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation. Page 12.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

content.<sup>128</sup> However, this attack was believed to have come from outside of Europe. There are some studies which suggest that rather than investing in developing their own capabilities, some terrorist groups are looking to online criminal enterprises, using the ever more popular crime-as-a-service industry to acquire any capabilities their peers are lacking. As the average membership age of European recruits falls younger and cybercrime services are bolstered, it is reasonable to speculate that the effectiveness and popularity of cyber-terrorism is likely to increase in coming years. Although currently European jihadists groups favour the drama and provocative nature of real-world violent attacks, cyber-attacks in the future may intensify the impact of a real-world attack if utilised in tandem, by disrupting emergency services for example.<sup>129</sup>

Generally speaking, appropriation or integration is in theory an extension of alliances. Developing in-house capabilities can be viewed as a rational choice for terrorist organisations. Alliances come with intrinsic complications that can affect operational and organisational security. Clashes concerning strategies, distrust, betrayal and the potential for the other party to become competitors can cause discontent and threaten operations. As both anti-money laundering operations and counterterrorism measures are being ramped up across Europe, the threat of second-hand exposure is realised. Thus, it can be regarded as a rational choice to acquire any essential operational skills in-house. Furthermore, it can be viewed as rational to remove the 'middleman' and cut out outsourcing to reduce operational costs in response to the need to self-finance.

The move towards online financial and cybercrime would be a reasonable rational step for jihadist groups. Modern security trends exemplify that cybercrime is emerging as one of the biggest threats to European security and many high-profile attacks over the last couple of years have reinforced their impact. Anonymity is key for most effective terrorist organisations and a move towards cybercrime affords terrorists with means of acquiring finances and causing destructive while keeping their identity hidden. It also provides an alternative to suicide bombing as a means of attacking their perceived enemies. The new ability of online financial micro-transactions provides terrorists with a method of discreetly moving money across borders to finance operations abroad or within Europe without having to enlist the help of external organisations to help smuggle cash. Although recent reports state that jihadists are still far from

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<sup>128</sup> Kim Sengupta. 2017. "Isis-Linked Hackers Attack NHS Websites to Show Gruesome Syrian Civil War Images". *The Independent*, 2017. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/isis-islamist-hackers-nhs-websites-cyber-attack-syrian-civil-war-images-islamic-state-a7567236.html>.

<sup>129</sup> Europol. 2018. "European Union Situation and Trend Report 2018". TESAT. Brussels: European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation. Page 12.

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effectively using cybercrime as a terrorism strategy, it can be considered a rational choice that terrorist groups are seeking to develop these capabilities and are appropriating tactics from cybercriminals.

## Organisational Crime-Terror Nexus

A criticism of the current scope of crime-terror literature is that most research does not take into account the changing structural dynamics of terrorist groups. Makarenko's 'crime-terror continuum' refers to cooperation, convergence and transformation and focusses on the interaction between terrorist organisations and organised crime groups as a decision made by influential leaders within the groups<sup>130</sup>. Shelley and Picarelli have observed the way in which terrorists adopt and adapt criminal methods of financing.<sup>131</sup> While it is agreed that modern terrorists will choose to engage in almost any illegal opportunity that aligns with their motives, and as previously discussed, it is thought that terrorist groups are less likely to retain a penchant towards entrepreneurship. Thus, it is believed by a few academics in the field that it is unlikely that symbiotic relations or continual alliances will form between groups.<sup>132</sup>

However, many accounts are either behind the trend or do not acknowledge that terrorist structures, methodologies and recruitment tactics are changing within the European context and across the world. Proliferating jihadist groups that threaten European security such as the Islamic State and al-Qaeda no longer function under a hierarchical structure, but as a form of dispersed, loosely affiliated autonomous cells which often have their own strategic goals and pursuits that are not necessarily in accordance with that of the group's wider leadership.<sup>133</sup> The move away from the top-down style pecking order is very rarely discussed in relation to the nexus and traditional literature fails to recognise the interaction between autonomous jihadist cells and crime in Europe.

Pressure from international law enforcement is driving criminal and terrorist organisations to decentralise their hierarchies and organisational leadership components. Despite the dramatic rise of the Islamic State terrorist group in the past couple of years, their territorial gains, and their compelling influence in Europe, the group has now lost the vast majority of their

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<sup>130</sup> Tamara Makarenko. 2004. "The Crime-Terror Continuum: Tracing the Interplay between Transnational Organised Crime and Terrorism". *Global Crime* 6 (1): 129-145.

<sup>131</sup> Louise I. Shelley, and John T. Picarelli. 2005. "Methods and Motives: Exploring Links between Transnational Organized Crime and International Terrorism". *Trends in Organized Crime* 9 (2).

<sup>132</sup> Phil Williams. "Cooperation Among Criminal Organizations." In *Transnational Organized Crime and International Security: Business as Usual?* edited by Mats Berdal and Monica Serrano, 67–80. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2002.

<sup>133</sup> Chris Dishman. 2005. "The Leaderless Nexus: When Crime and Terror Converge". *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 28 (3): 237.



strongholds in Iraq and Syria.<sup>134</sup> Many of the leaders of who reigned control or who had a major influence on operations within Europe have been either killed or captured. A similar pattern was evident after 9/11 which forced Bin Laden to take on the role of an inspirational figurehead rather than a key manager meticulously planning attacks and distributing commands.<sup>135</sup> This can be seen more recently as the Islamic State and other jihadists groups take to remotely disseminating propaganda online in the hopes of instigating radicalisation and to action a call to arms in Europe to inspire attacks without having to rely on a chain of command.<sup>136</sup>

The flattening of internal structures has created new prospects for collaboration between terrorists and criminals. Jihadist cells are using their independence from a centralised command to either collaborate with local crime syndicates or engage in criminal behaviour on their own volition. Each individual cell has the independence to form their own strategy and can take part in activities that may have been restricted due to the activity potentially damaging the broader mandate of the organisation. The result is the emergence of a 'leaderless nexus', as described by Dishman<sup>137</sup>, which can help make sense of the merging of criminal and terrorist milieus in European cities such as Paris and Brussels.

Abdelhamid Abaaoud, one the notorious ringleaders of the deadly Paris attacks, has been linked to a congregation of radicalised thieves led by an individual known as "Santa Claus". The group established a petty-crime crime operation in order to raise finances for the Islamic State, with some members following on to travel to fight in Syria.<sup>138</sup> Khalid Zerkani allegedly headed the network, gifting cash and presents to wayward youths he then recruited to carry out thefts and scout potential foreign fighters. As a group, they would target tourist hotspots and would pickpocket and steal luggage. The profits would at least in part be used to help send recruits to Syria from Europe. Stealing is forbidden within Islam, but such activities have been found to

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<sup>134</sup> "Iraq War Map: Who Controls What". 2018. *Aljazeera*.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/interactive/2016/08/iraq-war-map-controls-160830115440480.html>.

<sup>135</sup> Chris Dishman. 2005. "The Leaderless Nexus: When Crime and Terror Converge". *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 28 (3): 237.

<sup>136</sup> Europol. 2017. "European Union Situation and Trend Report 2018". TESAT. Brussels: European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation. Page 37.

<sup>137</sup> Dishman, Chris. 2005. "The Leaderless Nexus: When Crime and Terror Converge". *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 28 (3): 237.

<sup>138</sup> Anthony Faiola and Souhad Mekhennet. 2015. "The Islamic State Creates A New Type of Jihadist: Part Terrorist, Part Gangster". *The Washington Post*, 2015.

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/the-islamic-state-creates-a-new-type-of-jihadist-part-terrorist-part-gangster/2015/12/20/1a3d65da-9bae-11e5-aca6-](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/the-islamic-state-creates-a-new-type-of-jihadist-part-terrorist-part-gangster/2015/12/20/1a3d65da-9bae-11e5-aca6-1ae3be6f06d2_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.556620da5f10)

[1ae3be6f06d2\\_story.html?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.556620da5f10](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/the-islamic-state-creates-a-new-type-of-jihadist-part-terrorist-part-gangster/2015/12/20/1a3d65da-9bae-11e5-aca6-1ae3be6f06d2_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.556620da5f10).

be rationalised through the logic that they are targeting non-believers and that crimes are committed for the sake of the wider operation.<sup>139</sup> According to Mohamed Karim Haddad, a young man whose brother travelled to fight in Syria, Zerkani was a master manipulator who targeted young and socially awkward men, “probably for his own business”.<sup>140</sup> These newer jihadist groups highlight a shift from older groups such as al-Qaeda who strictly interpreted theology and whose recruitment materials traditionally relied on exposure to long sermons of Osama bin Laden. The deputy director of the Geneva Centre for Security Policy stated that the connection with criminality was not something that would have been endorsed by Osama bin Laden and that “you had a certain fundamentalism within the terror”.<sup>141</sup>

Although the Islamic State has a different modus operandi to al-Qaeda, the progression to decentralised structures in recent years proves that individual cells are essentially free to interpret the cause how they see fit and to formulate their own operations without the need for instruction. Any alliances or affiliations between smaller cells and localised crime groups would be even more challenging to trace and thus more effective than a formal partnership between the top leaders of either group. The appropriation of criminal skills within their own autonomous cell means that they do not have to broker potentially expensive trade deals with criminal organisations and do not have to rely on funds filtered through from central command. This could be regarded as a rational choice, beneficial to the overarching strategic goals. Further still, if groups can find a way to recruit, radicalise and utilise individuals who already have criminal backgrounds, they gain an individual who is not only readily trained in beneficial criminal skills, but is likely to be prepared to use them. The recruitment of criminals could also be considered a rational choice in this case. The growing trend in the radicalisation of criminals will be discussed in more depth in the next chapter of the thesis.

From a social psychological perspective, the social organisation of collectives has influence over interactions between group members and ‘outsiders’.<sup>142</sup> The nature of connections within the group is thought to affect the overall functionality, permeability and group stability. Similar

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<sup>139</sup> Anthony Faiola and Souhad Mekhennet. 2015. "The Islamic State Creates A New Type of Jihadist: Part Terrorist, Part Gangster". *The Washington Post*, 2015.

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/the-islamic-state-creates-a-new-type-of-jihadist-part-terrorist-part-gangster/2015/12/20/1a3d65da-9bae-11e5-aca6-1ae3be6f06d2\\_story.html?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.556620da5f10](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/the-islamic-state-creates-a-new-type-of-jihadist-part-terrorist-part-gangster/2015/12/20/1a3d65da-9bae-11e5-aca6-1ae3be6f06d2_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.556620da5f10).

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Sam Mullins. 2009. "Parallels Between Crime and Terrorism: A Social Psychological Perspective". *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 32 (9): 822.

to modern jihadist groups, organised crime networks are considered to be fluid, interconnected with a significant degree of autonomy. Affiliations between members of crime organisations are often based on a shared identity, kinship, friendship and geographical proximity.<sup>143</sup> The likenesses between criminal and terrorist groups on a structural level adds another similarity between the two usually separately studied fields to the crime-terror nexus.

Paoli denotes to the concept of ‘ritual kinship’ in relation to organised crime.<sup>144</sup> For example, when joining Cosa Nostra, the recruit enters what Max Weber would refer to as a form of status contract.<sup>145</sup> The new member is required to relinquish themselves of any past allegiances and submit themselves subordinately to group membership. Like most status contracts, fraternisation is a major component within organised crime groups and members are bound in a form of brotherhood based on generalised reciprocity. This is also seen within modern jihadist groups in Europe, who often refer to themselves as ‘brothers’ and can even disregard ties to their biological family for the cause. Yoni Mayne, a member of the criminal and terrorist network headed by Zerkani, left for Syria in 2013 after multiple previous run-ins with the law. He briefly returned home a couple of months later, as his mother begged him and the authorities to stop her son returning to Syria.<sup>146</sup> The authorities assured that they were tracking him but nevertheless, Mayne abandoned his family again and returned to Syria in January 2014, alongside Abdelhamid Abaaoud and his 13-year-old brother. Mayne is believed to have been killed in combat fighting for the Islamic State in March 2014. It is reported that in Brussels, individuals in small networks are known to aid and abet terrorists and help conceal them from police due to a fierce sense of personal loyalty and a shared distrust in the state.<sup>147</sup>

Paoli states that as part of a ‘social contract’ after obtaining membership of criminal organisations such as the mafia, are obligated to support each other materially and financially. The bond of loyalty is strong and mafia leaders can exploit these relationships with a degree of flexibility in order to benefit short-term goals.<sup>148</sup> In line with the understandings of generalised reciprocity, the low-level figures are not afforded the ultimate decision as to whether to follow

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<sup>143</sup> Michael Kenney. 2007. "The Architecture of Drug Trafficking: Network Forms of Organisation In The Colombian Cocaine Trade". *Global Crime* 8 (3): 233-259.

<sup>144</sup> Letizia Paoli, “The Paradoxes of Organized Crime”, *Crime, Law, and Social Change*, Vol 37, No 1, 2002, pp. 51-97.

<sup>145</sup> Letizia Paoli, “The Paradoxes of Organized Crime”, *Crime, Law, and Social Change*, Vol 37, No 1, 2002, pp. 51-97.

<sup>146</sup> BBC. 2016. "Brussels Attacks: Molenbeek's Gangster Jihadists". *BBC News*.  
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-35890960>.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Letizia Paoli, “The Paradoxes of Organized Crime”, 2002.

orders or not. Paoli states that the status contract bond is so unconditional that members are expected to abandon ties with family and friends in favour of membership and are expected to even sacrifice their own life if requested by the group. In exchange, members reap the benefits of the collective action, kinship and the reputation of the group. Zerkani, who is said to be a master manipulator of young and vulnerable men, targeted individuals at cafes and on the streets in deprived neighbourhoods and introduced them to a network of recruits with similar backgrounds. Ultimately, Zerkani has been directly tied to at least thirty or forty individuals who left Belgium for Syria, often leaving together in groups. The bond of loyalty appears to be so robust that they are willing to accompany their peers abroad to face a fate that will likely result in death, facilitated by their leader. This further highlights the comparisons between criminal and terrorist groups and the loyalty of members within their separate cells.

The clannish model of an organisational formula is also evident in jihadist cells and even youth gangs. Cohen argues that the central concerns of gangs point to relational problems and rewards such as security, cohesiveness, warmth and status.<sup>149</sup> It is interesting to address these ties within the context of Zerkani and his loyal group of thieves. The bond offered to the vulnerable young men conscripted to the group could be considered to be that of a status contract. The alliance of similar individuals offered them a sense of identity, security, financial support, and a group of loyal co-dependents to consider 'brothers' that may have replaced weak social ties within their previous daily lives. A former friend of Abaaoud in Brussels named Farid, who had also been in and out of jail, described the life of young Muslims Molanbeek, a district in Brussels where Zerkani hunted for recruits. He describes conditions for Muslims youth in the area as hopeless, with many feeling that they are rejected by both their current state as their state of their or their parent's origin.<sup>150</sup> Amongst Zerkani's recruits were second or third generation immigrants from a wide range of origin states who struggled with troubled backgrounds. Molanbeek locals such as Mohamed Maalem state that they struggle with identity and self-esteem.<sup>151</sup> Despite their individual differences, the individuals in their network shared the connection of religion, lack of opportunities and even criminal backgrounds in some cases.

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<sup>149</sup> Albert Cohen. 1977. "The Concept of a Criminal Organisation". *British Journal of Criminology* 17 (2): 97-111.

<sup>150</sup> Anthony Faiola, and Souhad Mekhennet. 2015. "The Islamic State Creates A New Type of Jihadist: Part Terrorist, Part Gangster". *The Washington Post*, 2015.  
[https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/the-islamic-state-creates-a-new-type-of-jihadist-part-terrorist-part-gangster/2015/12/20/1a3d65da-9bae-11e5-aca6-1ae3be6f06d2\\_story.html?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.556620da5f10](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/the-islamic-state-creates-a-new-type-of-jihadist-part-terrorist-part-gangster/2015/12/20/1a3d65da-9bae-11e5-aca6-1ae3be6f06d2_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.556620da5f10).

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

Farid attests that groups such as the Zerkani's and the wider Islamic State organisation appeals to young people in Molanbeek as it provides a sense of belonging.

The solidarity within the group proved highly beneficial for Zerkani who was then able to manipulate and radicalise individuals into conforming to the group's wider strategic goals. This is not dissimilar to theories of organised crime membership which offers its members a collective sense of identity and belonging. While not dismissing the importance of individual motivations and personal connections to the cause, the sense of shared identity and collective purpose among disenfranchised individuals within communities that can be offered by local terrorist networks appears to be an appealing incentive to local terrorist cells. The shared criminal history of its members and the use of criminal tactics already in use by the groups can lift the stigma and can reassure acceptance of individuals who have exhibited criminal behaviours in the past. A number of comparisons can be drawn with the structure and processes of organised crime groups and terrorism studies can further benefit from theories and analysis traditionally utilised by criminological and social research.

## Social Crime-Terror Nexus

### *Radicalisation*

Over the past few years, the European theatre has been witnessed thousands of its citizens mobilise and travel across the continent to join jihadist groups in the Middle East such as Islamic State, al-Nusra and other regional organisations. The conflicts in Iraq and Syria have mobilised an unprecedented number of foreign fighters never seen before in jihadist causes. Both supporters who have stayed in Europe, travelled abroad to fight, and returning jihadists have left an impact on the terrorism landscape in Europe and have been responsible for the strategic successes of some of the deadliest terrorist attacks in Europe over the past few years. As briefly discussed, one of the most interesting trends in terrorism linked to Europe in recent years is the proliferation of recruits who have a previous criminal background and at least initially do not historically have a strong connection to Islamic fundamentalism. This is in contrast to older archetypes that depict terrorists as middle-class university students, though this is not to discount that some individuals still share these characteristics. Information that has emerged over the past couple of years that suggests that the more traditional understandings of the crime-terror nexus do not encapsulate the newer trend of minor criminals being radicalised and progressing to full-scale terrorist attacks. As the last spree of terrorist attacks across Europe in recent years was part-led by current and former petty criminals, one of the most compelling questions is how past criminality and subsequent experiences, narrative and networks contributes to the processes of their own radicalisation.

There is evidence to suggest that jihadist groups such as Islamic State are accompanying their operations in the Middle East with recruiting supporters in Europe to facilitate self-funded and low-cost terrorist attacks in the European theatre, financed through crime.<sup>152</sup> Through the modern globally connected world of the online community, jihadist groups have developed the ability to open channels of communication and remotely radicalise criminals and inspire attacks, free from the boundaries of state borders.<sup>153</sup> Although elements of crime within terrorist groups is not a particularly newfound concept, the idea that the criminal history of an individual might be used as a fundamental component in their own targeted radicalisation is a notion that

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<sup>152</sup> Rajan Basra, Peter Neumann, and Claudia Brunner. 2016. *Criminal Pasts, Terrorist Futures: European Jihadists and the New Crime-Terror Nexus*. London: International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence. <http://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Criminal-Pasts-Terrorist-Futures.pdf>.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

has rarely been considered, until recently. This demonstrates that jihadist networks do need even need to have physical representatives present to start the process of radicalisation.

There does appear to be tentative evidence that denotes to the targeted recruitment of criminals in Europe being used as an operational practice by jihadist groups. One of the few groups that had consistently displayed these methods of recruitment was a network of Syrian-based members of Islamic State who joined in 2014. The group were British-born and known as Rayat al-Tawheed. They regularly disseminated propaganda aimed at those leading the ‘gangster life’ in the hopes of inspiring groups to join their ranks overseas.<sup>154</sup> The slogan ‘sometimes people with the worst pasts create the best futures’ was attached to flashy images of men with intimidating weapons against Hollywood action film-style backdrops, an unambiguous and comprehensibly captivating nod towards depictions of an idyllic metamorphosis from outlaw to hero. Propaganda glamorising violent conflicts has developed into one of the signature recruitment tactics of modern jihadism, and its evocative symbolism is thought to prove appealing to Westerners. The approach to this specific form of propaganda provides an insight into the intended recruitment pool targeted by modern jihadist groups; namely young, troubled males who are ostracised by their community and are prospectively susceptible to manipulation.

The Islamic State’s magazine, Rumiya, has endorsed criminal turned-jihadists and upheld criminal activity as a form of jihad. Islamic State fighter Macramé Abrougui was featured in a eulogy which included some materials which appeared to showcase the crime-terror nexus in a positive light.<sup>155</sup> The authors maintained that Abrougui freed himself of his former identity of a ‘fierce gangster’ and transformed himself into a ‘true Muslim’.<sup>156</sup> His criminal past was romanticised with their insistence that despite his former taste for disobedience and sin, he was now noble and generous, emphasising that he was ‘not afraid of confrontation, nor would he run from a fight’.<sup>157</sup> It appears that the publication not only condoned his skill set benefitted from a life of crime, but portrayed his short-lived life as something to aspire to.

Another interesting perspective as to how the Islamic State publication opted to depict his involvement in what would typically be considered a highly criminal and immoral act under Islamic law. One of Abrougui’s first assigned mission was to join another group of French jihadists in stalking and stealing €200,000 from a local drug dealer in a calculated and

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<sup>154</sup> Rajan Basra, and Peter R. Neumann. 2017. "Crime as Jihad: Developments in the Crime-Terror Nexus in Europe". West Point: Combating Terrorism Centre.

<sup>155</sup> Rumiya, Issue 11, Al Hayat Media Center, 2017, pp. 44-52.

<sup>156</sup> Rumiya, Issue 11, Al Hayat Media Center, 2017, pp. 45.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid

coordinated manoeuvre.<sup>158</sup> The magazine credited the successful procedure to previous experience of the group in criminal enterprise. They claimed that what would traditionally be regarded as immoral as a ‘form of worship sought to draw closer to Allah’,<sup>159</sup> as opposed to engaging in improper moral behaviour. This alludes to the Islamic State magazine supporting that criminal activities are endorsed by Allah if the motive is deemed justifiable. Organisational philosophies like these have the potential to resonate with criminals by offering acceptance of previous criminal and immoral behaviour and offering a pathway to redemption.<sup>160</sup> It is difficult to assess the power and influence of propaganda, particularly with such little empirical evidence available and with the phenomena still recent and ongoing, though it is reasonable to accept that this type of powerful propaganda may have had a lasting impression on former criminals and may have contributed to the processes of radicalisation.

It can be considered a rational choice for terrorist networks within Europe and overseas to utilise this method of remote radicalisation. The organisations offer empowerment to those who feel disconnected and strained within their environments. Targeting and utilising criminals is comprehensible as they already possess a willingness to disobey the law and disregard societal norms within their respective countries. It makes logical sense to target individuals who may already possess the necessary criminal skills to either contribute to the financial welfare of the group or may already have a propensity towards violence. The longing for a sense of identity and potentially limited understandings of Islamic scripture could make troubled individuals more vulnerable to the processes of radicalisation.

#### *The Redemption Narrative*

The relevance of an individual’s personal history of criminal behaviour and the effect on their experiences and networks is proving to contribute to their pathway to radicalisation is becoming more apparent, and this may provide an important focus for research when more data becomes available. Recent radicalisation studies have alluded to what has been coined ‘the redemption narrative’.<sup>161</sup> This concept refers to individuals who have experienced a personal crisis or some form of major life change that has forced them to re-value their priorities and the course of their life. The abrupt situational change leaves the individual in a vulnerable position, experiencing a form of ‘cognitive opening’ which leads them to be more receptive to a radical change in

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<sup>158</sup> Rumiya, Issue 11, Al Hayat Media Center, 2017. Page 46.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid

<sup>160</sup> Edwin Bakker. 2007. *Jihadi Terrorists in Europe*. The Hague: Clingendael Institute. Page 14.

<sup>161</sup> Rajan Basra, and Peter R. Neumann. 2017. "Crime as Jihad: Developments in the Crime-Terror Nexus in Europe". West Point: Combating Terrorism Centre.



values and behaviours.<sup>162</sup> For example, for Muslim criminals who escalate into jihadism, this may relate to a sudden epiphany about the impact of their previous immoral behaviour and the longing to break away from their past life and repent of their sins. A prime example of this behaviour is Abderrozak Benarabe. Benerabe is a former career criminal who was previously based in Copenhagen. He stated that one of his motivations for travelling abroad to become a foreign fighter in the name of Allah was in an attempt to bolster the power of his prayers in light of his brother's cancer diagnosis.<sup>163</sup> The desire for a stronger personal connection to religious faith may be an effective rationale for involvement in jihadist groups.

Basra and Neumann's purport that radicalisation and recruitment into a jihadist group may not be as significant a jump for criminals as it may seem.<sup>164</sup> The crossover from the criminal world into jihadism can be viewed as an alignment of needs and narratives. Joining a jihadist group grants redemption from their perceived sins while also feeding into some of the desires that pulled them towards a life of crime in the first place. Jihadist groups symbolise power for the powerless, glamorise adrenaline fuelled violence, provide an opportunity for rebellion against the status quo in which they lack opportunities, and a sense of identity provided by a collectively ostracised collective share operational similarities with the criminal gangs some recruits are already accustomed to.<sup>165</sup> While religion is undeniably a component of radicalisation, for modern jihadist groups, particularly in European recruits, there is far less of a heavy focus on scripture and theology as older prominent groups such as al-Qaeda. Leaked Islamic State documents found that in the recruitment process, almost zero knowledge of religion or regard for theology is required and that most foreign recruits have a very poor grasp of the Islamic faith.<sup>166</sup> Although to outsiders, radicalisation and recruitment into violent jihadism may seem like an extraordinary transformation under any circumstance, the operational and cognitive

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<sup>162</sup> Pauline Aarten G. M., Eva Mulder, and Antony Pemberton. 2017. "The Narrative of Victimization and Deradicalisation: An Expert View". *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 1-16.

<sup>163</sup> Rajan Basra, Peter Neumann, and Claudia Brunner. 2016. *Criminal Pasts, Terrorist Futures: European Jihadists and the New Crime-Terror Nexus*. London: International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence. <http://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Criminal-Pasts-Terrorist-Futures.pdf>.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Manni Crone and Martin Harrow. "Homegrown Terrorism in the West." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 23.4 (2011): 521–536.

<sup>166</sup> Aya Batrawy, Paisley Dodds, and Lori Hinnant. 2016. "Leaked ISIS Documents Reveal Recruits Have Poor Grasp of Islamic Faith". *The Independent*. 2016. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/isis-documents-leak-recruits-islam-sharia-religion-faith-syria-iraq-a7193086.html>.

parallels drawn between the appeal of jihadists groups and the similarities to a criminal gang may make the leap from criminality to jihadism more comprehensible. This aspect also highlights the important notion that religion and devotion to faith is often not a prerequisite in radicalisation and terrorism. Further studies in terrorism could stand to learn from other disciplines and take into account other potential contributing factors in the processes of radicalisation that are not solely based on religious inclination.

Further to the appeal of the redemption narrative, the legitimisation of crime may not only entice an individual towards radicalisation but incite the members of jihadist groups to continue using criminal methods for the sake of the cause. This is not a particularly new concept. Al-Qaeda representatives have previously been found to encourage 'lone wolves' into thievery and to disobey the laws of their enemies, vowing that 'Muslims are not bound by the covenants of citizenship'. The Islamic State follows a similar approach, and the new pool of criminals-turned-jihadists has created a pool of willing recruits to carry out financially beneficial operations without having to provide training or the need to programme behavioural changes. Experienced criminals are less likely to get caught. As previously mentioned, Khalid Zerkani initially made a living as a small-time criminal in Belgium before utilising an adapting his skills to benefit jihadism and becoming a highly influential master of foreign fighter recruitment.<sup>167</sup> Zerkani completely legitimised the use of crime to his impressionable recruits, some of which were already criminals, and encouraged his protégés to steal from 'infidels' to fund foreign travel to Syria. The case of Zerkani, Abdelhamid Abaaoud and their network of jihadists is a prime example of the modern crossover of the crime-terror nexus in Europe and, according to Basra and Neumann, can help explain why the comparatively small country of Belgium exported almost 500 jihadist foreign fighters in only four years. This type of observable snowball effect or collective change in behaviour is consistent with social science theories of radicalisation which accentuate the importance of social bonds in the recruitment process, such as social movement theory.<sup>168</sup>

#### *Socio-Economic Status*

In criminological and social research, socio-economic context is often considered when analysing social problems. Many prolific scholars have deliberated on the link between

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<sup>167</sup> Pieter Van Ostaeyen, 'Belgian Radical Networks and the Road to the Paris Attacks', CTC Sentinel, 16 June 2016.

<sup>168</sup> Colin Beck. 2008. "The Contribution of Social Movement Theory to Understanding Terrorism". *Sociology Compass* 2 (5): 1565-1581.

socioeconomic status and delinquent behaviour.<sup>169</sup> Modern manifestations of the nexus in Europe offer a challenge to traditional interpretations of terrorist typologies. Where terrorists were once considered to originate from middle and upper-class milieus that would rarely have any involvement in petty crime, recent information suggests the contrary.<sup>170</sup> As previously suggested, there is growing evidence to support that individuals in inner-cities and areas lacking opportunities are often targeted by terrorist recruiters. Although the links between either crime or terrorism and socio-economic class can often prove a source of contention, it is valuable to acknowledge any new trends in research and analyse them from the similar approach as deviant behaviour to help further understand the phenomena. Some scholars attest that challenging socio-economic conditions may have double the effect on offenders in general, with emphasis on radicalised individuals.<sup>171</sup> Poor social and economic environments can often reflect in poor education. Scarce opportunities in contributing to the labour force may add to the vulnerabilities that lead to violent offending.<sup>172</sup> Furthermore, it may result in added resilience towards de-radicalisation and reintegration, adding further complexities to criminal recidivism. Therefore, reviewing socio-economic factors of the crime-terror nexus may add an important insight into prevention policy for both violent crimes in general and the threat of terrorism and radicalisation.

Ljubic et al. addressed the need for a socio-economic perspective and compiled statistical data from Dutch police data and other quantitative open-source information and compared the results with wider European demographics.<sup>173</sup> They were cross-referenced with non-terrorism related violent crime offenders. They found that generally, the data indicated that low socio-economic status is prevalent both among violent offenders and those convicted of terrorism

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<sup>169</sup> Robert Agnew. "Foundation for a general strain theory of crime and delinquency." *Criminology* 30, no. 1 (1992): 47-88. ; Albert K Cohen. "The concept of criminal organisation." *Brit. J. Criminology* 17 (1977): 97.

<sup>170</sup> Rajan Basra, Peter Neumann, and Claudia Brunner. 2016. *Criminal Pasts, Terrorist Futures: European Jihadists and the New Crime-Terror Nexus*. London: International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence. <http://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Criminal-Pasts-Terrorist-Futures.pdf>. Page 13.

<sup>171</sup> Bakker, Edwin, and R Du Bont. 2016. "Belgian And Dutch Jihadist Foreign Fighters: Characteristics, Motivations, And Roles in The War in Syria And Iraq". *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 27 (5): 837-857.

<sup>172</sup> Kubrin, C.E., and E.A. Stewart. 2006. "Predicting Who Reoffends: The Neglected Role of Neighbourhood Context in Recidivism Studies". *Criminology* 44 (1): 165-97.

<sup>173</sup> Ljubic, Vanja, Jan Willem van Prooijen, and Frank Weerman. 2017. "Beyond the Crime-Terror Nexus: Socio-Economic Status, Violent Crimes and Terrorism". *Journal of Criminological Research, Policy and Practice* 3 (3).

offences. They found that 64 percent of jihadists did not have a job at the time of offending and that second-generation migrants were over-represented in all samples. Moreover, they found that little to none of the sample of Dutch jihadists had completed high school qualifications or vocational training and often became unemployed post-education. This trend correlates with the wider European data displayed in the study which suggests that at least two-thirds of jihadists are poorly educated or unemployed. The vast majority of the sample were men at 84 percent and are mostly young men with an average age of 25 years old.

As previously discussed, the crossover between crime and terrorism can often emerge in deprived suburbs of large cities and metropolitan areas. Considered from the perspective of strain theory, it could be argued that the nexus can emerge as a form of subcultural response to both personal and collective strains.<sup>174</sup> Individual strains such as the devaluation of socio-economic status due to job loss or financial instability can function as a psychological trigger for violence. The poor education, qualifications and job prospects evident in the Dutch sample supports this claim. The lack of conventional skills, when combined with a previous history of criminality, stands to further obstruct any chances of social mobility, adding further strain.

Ljubic et al. argue that individuals who received poor education are more likely to legitimise violence as a device for achieving political goals.<sup>175</sup> As such, it may be less challenging to manipulate those into jihadi ideologies to those who are less likely to have been informed about civil liberties, civil society and democracy in an educational setting. This could in turn lead to simplified worldviews which can be viewed through a violent lens. While it is extremely challenging to establish causality in any case and data is scarce, these findings provide a brief insight into the background conditions in which both violent crime and terrorism can be initiated. In light of strain theory, modern trends such as using criminal activities to support jihad are likely to flourish under severe strains and insecurity. Severe strains can lead to anger and frustration, and thus it can help explain the path to extremist ideologies that could be perceived as restoring the balance of power against the source of strains.

### *Financing*

Despite the most logical affiliation between the crime-terror nexus being the accumulation of finances for operational methods, one of the most recent trends in modern terrorism in Europe

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<sup>174</sup> Cottee, S. 2011. "Jihadism as A Subcultural Response to Social Strain". *Terrorism and Political Violence* 23 (5): 730-51.

<sup>175</sup> Ljubic, Vanja, Jan Willem van Prooijen, and Frank Weerman. 2017. "Beyond the Crime-Terror Nexus: Socio-Economic Status, Violent Crimes and Terrorism". *Journal of Criminological Research, Policy and Practice* 3 (3). Page 185.

that cannot be ignored is the move towards less sophisticated, low-cost attack strategies as opposed to the more complex plots that require money, expertise and leadership that were more evident over a decade ago. The most popular trend that is likely to continue in the coming years is simplistic methods that have very few associated costs such as using moving vehicles as weapons and public stabbings as demonstrated in Barcelona, London and Stockholm in 2017 to name a few.<sup>176</sup> With this in mind, it is understandable how it may seem that the use of petty crime on an operational scale seems redundant. Despite the move away from more costly endeavours, up to 40% of the financing of recent terrorist plots in Europe have involved elements of petty crime; namely theft, counterfeit goods and the sale of drugs.<sup>177</sup> Recent research suggests that radicalised individuals that have previously exhibited criminal behaviour are more likely to continue to use similar methods of operation as they did previous to their recruitment.<sup>178</sup>

In the United Kingdom, the most recent proven recidivism rates reach around 49.5 percent for adults who have been incarcerated for committing theft, and similarly high rates for other money-generating crimes.<sup>179</sup> The same factors that push individuals into criminal activity are likely to be similar to the draws that pull them back to crime following incarceration. This could also be the case with criminal jihadists. For jihadists who have previously supported themselves through crime, it could be viewed as the rational choice to continue operations as usual. The attraction of a sense of familiarity combined with the failure to reintegrate into mainstream society after incarceration or returning from fighting abroad could make a continuation of criminal activity a desirable or seemingly necessary choice. A perceived lack of opportunities exacerbated by any time spent in prison could make it more difficult to generate income through legal channels and still contribute to the network. If the end goal for jihadists is to contribute to the operations of the network and the wider cause, and if criminality has already proved a successful money-generating endeavour, it could be argued that a continuation of any criminal activity could be regarded as a rational choice. Despite the move towards relatively lower cost

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<sup>176</sup> CNN. 2017. "Terrorist Attacks by Vehicle Fast Facts". 2017.

<http://edition.cnn.com/2017/05/03/world/terrorist-attacks-by-vehicle-fast-facts/index.html>.

<sup>177</sup> Rajan Basra, Peter Neumann, and Claudia Brunner. 2016. *Criminal Pasts, Terrorist Futures: European Jihadists and the New Crime-Terror Nexus*. London: International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence. <http://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Criminal-Pasts-Terrorist-Futures.pdf>.

<sup>178</sup> Peter Neumann. 2010. "Prisons and Terrorism Radicalisation and De-Radicalisation in 15 Countries". London: International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence.

<sup>179</sup> Ministry of Justice. 2018. "Proven Reoffending Statistics Quarterly Bulletin: October 2016 To December 2016". London: Office of National Statistics.

attacks, the withdrawal of financial support from traditional hierarchal structures and state sponsors in previous years has led to the need to find alternative financing strategies. With a stamp of approval to continue financing through crime from groups such as the Islamic State, the stigma attached to criminal behaviour has been lifted, particularly if any crimes are committed against their perceived enemies in Europe. With the rise of former criminals in jihadist circles, a continuation of previous patterns of illicit behaviour, and the Islamic State and other jihadist groups promoting crime as the preferred means of fundraising, it appears likely that the trend of using crime as an unlawful funding method may continue to increase in the future. If authorities are to effectively counter terrorism and curb terrorist financing, it may prove beneficial to approach the problem from a rational choice perspective.

In criminology, strain theories suggest that blocked opportunities result in alternative methods to resolve adversity, including crime.<sup>180</sup> When applied to the nexus, if there are hurdles to contribute to society in a meaningful way in the face of multi-faceted challenges, an individual may be more likely to participate in both criminal and terrorist activity, particularly if they were already acclimatised to criminal methods of financing. A more sociological perspective may argue that a disadvantaged status among the European 'underclass' accommodates cooperation between street criminals and criminal jihadists. Alain Gringard of the counter-terror agency in Belgium states that home-grown and European based jihadist networks can often fulfil the role of an extension of inner-city crime for many of its members.<sup>181</sup> This view is particularly relevant in terrorism affected cities such as Brussels who have low socio-economic regions such as Molanbeek, where the lines between terrorism and crime can be blurred. This idea that low-level and financial based crimes to support terrorism can be seen as a branch of inner-city crime is another reason why it is valuable to assess the crime-terror nexus from a social and criminological standpoint.

### *Prisons*

One of the most obvious opportunities for the mixing of criminal and terrorist milieus is during periods of incarceration. Prisons are well recognised globally as epicentres for radicalisation and recruitment, including in Europe. Jihadists have embraced the potential of prisons and as locations where they can purport their ideology and enlist others. The data presented in Neumann's study of 89 European jihadist profiles showed that nearly 60% of the sample

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<sup>180</sup> Ljubic, Vanja, Jan Willem van Prooijen, and Frank Weerman. 2017. "Beyond the Crime-Terror Nexus: Socio-Economic Status, Violent Crimes and Terrorism". *Journal of Criminological Research, Policy and Practice* 3 (3). Page 160.

<sup>181</sup> Dearden, Lizzie. 2016. "Isis Recruiting Violent Criminals and Gang Members Across Europe In Dangerous New 'Crime-Terror Nexus'". *The Independent*, 2016.

reported incarceration before mobilisation.<sup>182</sup> One example of radicalisation in prison is Omar el-Hussein, the gunman who shot two victims in a spree after announcing his loyalty to the Islamic State in February 2015. El-Hussein was involved in gangs as a teenager and was embroiled in criminal activity such as burglaries, street crime and drugs before being sentenced to prison in 2013 for a non-terrorism related stabbing.<sup>183</sup> While in incarceration, he became increasingly devoted to his faith and was known to have expressed the desire to travel to Syria to fight. The authorities were issued three radicalisation alerts on his behalf which were left unanswered. Upon being freed, el-Hussein ended up homeless and unemployed.<sup>184</sup> Two weeks after his release, he carried out the attack in Copenhagen.

Prison environments can provide an accommodating incubator for extremist movements. One of the primary concerns about the mix of milieus is that prison can bring together groups of politically charged offenders with 'ordinary' criminals, creating an opportunity to form an 'unholy alliance' between the two.<sup>185</sup> Because of this, instead of prison diminishing the risk of terrorism by removing offenders from the public realm, prison may provide an even more serious threat by fraternising ideologically inspired terrorists with the criminal energy and knowledge of more typical offenders, leading to a potential transfer of skills and motivations. As jihadists stand to benefit from new skills that may aid them in achieving their strategic goals, plus the possibility of enlisting new recruits, it could be considered a rational choice for jihadists to target criminals for radicalisation.

From a social and psychological perspective, imprisonment can be considered a form of personal crisis that could lead to a cognitive opening, providing new opportunities for self-reflection. The result may be increased vulnerability in newly incarcerated individuals. Due to the absence of close friends and family to act as a buffer, individuals experiencing cognitive reform may be far more receptive to jihadist ideology, particularly young Muslim men. Their openness to new ideas and weak connection to wider society makes them an almost effortless

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<sup>182</sup> Peter Neumann. 2010. "Prisons and Terrorism Radicalisation and De-Radicalisation in 15 Countries". London: International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence.

<sup>183</sup> Dearden, Lizzie. 2016. "Isis Recruiting Violent Criminals and Gang Members Across Europe In Dangerous New 'Crime-Terror Nexus'". *The Independent*, 2016.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Rajan Basra, Peter Neumann, and Claudia Brunner. 2016. *Criminal Pasts, Terrorist Futures: European Jihadists and the New Crime-Terror Nexus*. London: International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence. <http://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Criminal-Pasts-Terrorist-Futures.pdf>. Page 29.

target for jihadist recruiters.<sup>186</sup> The opportunity for criminals and terrorists to form alliances is an evident risk in a contained environment and engagement could lead to potential operational collaboration and the trade of expertise. Life following incarceration often leads to criminals to fall into a further life of crime. Those convicted of terrorist offences are likely to follow the trend of criminal recidivism due to limited opportunities for reintegration into society.<sup>187</sup> The recent wave of attacks in Europe has led to an unprecedented number of terrorism-related arrests and convictions. The threat of ever-expanding levels of incarcerated terrorists highlights that the relevance of the prison system to radicalisation will likely increase in the years to follow.

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<sup>186</sup> Peter Neumann. 2010. "Prisons and Terrorism Radicalisation and De-Radicalisation in 15 Countries". London: International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence.

<sup>187</sup> Rajan Basra, and Peter R. Neumann. 2017. "Crime as Jihad: Developments in the Crime-Terror Nexus in Europe". West Point: Combating Terrorism Centre.



## Conclusion

To conclude, this thesis supports that there is a distinct and identifiable relationship between terrorism and crime. Terrorists and organised criminals have a complex and multi-dimensional relationship that traditional understandings and frameworks of the crime-terror nexus do not fully take into account. At the institutional level, popularised by Makarenko<sup>188</sup>, the crime-terror nexus appears as a sliding continuum where terrorists and criminals interact on the basis of business-like arrangements or marriages of convenience. Despite providing a pivotal foundational pillar for further research, traditional interpretations of the nexus no longer address the challenges of modern jihadist groups. The structure of both terrorist organisations and organised crime groups have flattened in recent years and performs as more of a network-style structure.<sup>189</sup> The absence of prolific hierarchies and the relative political stability in Europe has moved the nexus away from high-level operations between major entities to smaller, more localised collaborations. The migration crisis has offered a new opportunity to generate partnerships.<sup>190</sup> From a theoretical perspective, the utility of rational choice theory is at its most exemplary at the institutional level. The use of rational choice theory in this sense can assist authorities in rethinking the relationships of organised crime syndicates and terrorist groups where they may seem unlikely partners.

The organisational level addresses the inner workings of criminal and terrorist groups and provides an insight into interrelations between group members. The move away from the top-down structures is very rarely discussed in relation to the nexus. The decentralisation of hierarchies and organisational leadership has afforded European jihadist groups more autonomy in their operations. This has provided new prospective opportunities for collaboration between terrorist cells and local criminal gangs. As each division of the jihadist cells gain independence from centralised commands, they are free to proceed with any strategy they deem fit for purpose. The recruitment of criminals and the continuation of criminal enterprise may be considered a rational choice in order to achieve their strategic goals. It is also important to recognise the social organisation aspects of the organisational level and how individual networks are able to radicalise and retain their members, particularly evident criminal jihadists. It is valuable to consider the operational level through the lens of social theory. As smaller

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<sup>188</sup> Tamara Makarenko. 2004. "The Crime-Terror Continuum: Tracing the Interplay between Transnational Organised Crime and Terrorism". *Global Crime* 6 (1): 129-145.

<sup>189</sup> Dishman, Chris. 2005. "The Leaderless Nexus: When Crime and Terror Converge". *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 28 (3): 237.

<sup>190</sup> Europol. 2018. "European Union Situation and Trend Report 2018". TESAT. Brussels: European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation. Page 11.

networks of criminals-turned-jihadists are a fairly new phenomena, they are more challenging to analyse. Exploring these groups by comparing them to similar behaviour in organised crime groups helps gain an insight into the processes of recruitment and the sense of social bond evident in both types of organisation.<sup>191</sup> Researching jihadist networks in a similar way to crime syndicates may help authorities understand the extra dimension added by criminality to terrorist networks that could help inform counter-strategies.

This thesis takes the viewpoint that the most vital and relevant areas to explore in response to the emergence of criminal jihadists is the various social factors that could potentially exacerbate circumstances. The processes of radicalisation and the focussed targeting of criminal recruits is perhaps the most poignant development in modern European jihad.<sup>192</sup> This method bypasses the need to outsource criminal skills to outsiders as self, group, and remotely radicalised individuals with criminal and often troubled pasts fulfil the necessary roles with the promise of redemption. Emerging data from across Europe challenges outdated notions that terrorists typically hail from wealthy foreign families or are groups of middle-class students. In criminological and social research, socio-economic factors are routinely taken into account when researching deviance. There is mounting evidence to suggest terrorist recruiters are targeted inner-cities and areas lacking opportunities to seek recruits. There is tentative evidence to suggest that the crossover between crime and terrorism can emerge in suburbs of cities experiencing relative deprivation. A lack of skills or employment opportunities can lead to social strain, causing the visibility of the nexus to appear in response to personal and collective strains.<sup>193</sup> Prisons can also act as hotbeds for radicalisation and provide one of the most obvious representations of the mix between crime and terrorism.

This intention of this thesis was to provide an exploratory and theoretical overview of the recent trends in the crime-terror nexus in Europe. One of the most difficult challenges of crime-terror research is accumulating relevant and reliable data due to access and availability issues. An acknowledged limitation of this thesis is the eclectic sampling and comparisons. However, this thesis intended to provide a preliminary foundation for further social explorations of this understudied field. Further research may seek to execute more restrictive, contextual or even

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<sup>191</sup> Letizia Paoli, "The Paradoxes of Organized Crime", *Crime, Law, and Social Change*, Vol 37, No 1, 2002, pp. 51-97.

<sup>192</sup> Rajan Basra, and Peter R. Neumann. 2017. "Crime as Jihad: Developments in the Crime-Terror Nexus in Europe". West Point: Combating Terrorism Centre.

<sup>193</sup> Agnew, Robert. "Foundation for a general strain theory of crime and delinquency." *Criminology* 30, no. 1 (1992): 47-88 ; Cohen, Albert K. "The concept of criminal organisation." *Brit. J. Criminology* 17 (1977): 97.

country-specific analysis either empirically or come the availability of further open-source research. Regardless of the limitations, this study has found that there are significant likenesses between terrorists and both low-level and organised criminals on an operational, group and individual level. While this research did not seek to compare the utility of any theories, multiple theories from a social and criminological aided in interpreting the data. This research did not make an attempt to highlight the most effective theory or make any attempt to assume causality, but rather explore the topic from a social perspective in order to expand the scope of the field and encourage further research. Given that social and criminological studies tend to suffer less access issue and therefore tend to have a more developed methodological and empirical standing, the incorporation of theory and perspective may prove to be a useful tool for crime-terror research and the study of terrorism in general in the future.

Countering terrorism appears to be becoming increasingly a social problem stemming from a range of interpersonal social factors that have emerged in large European cities. Attention also needs to be given to prisons and a counter-strategy against petty and organised crime in order to manage the threat from an integrated approach. The emergence of the crime-terror nexus and its recent dynamics in modern Europe should inspire researchers and policy-makers to challenge how traditional concepts of radicalisation, crime and terrorism have been previously understood. A strong connection to religious faith does not necessarily equate to a lack of criminality in the same manner that criminality is not necessarily parallel to terrorism. With more and more jihadists being prosecuted and incarcerated, prisons are likely to continue to play a significant role in the crime terror-nexus. It is essential that an assessment of the prison environment is carried out with a focus on overcrowding and reporting any suspected radicalised behaviour to further authorities. As the nexus crosses over institutional boundaries, it is recommended that agencies participate in information and data sharing. As terrorism can materialise in large-scale attacks and small-scale petty crime, all agencies need to be aware of early warning signs and coordinate in early intervention. The current form of the crime-terror nexus in modern European jihad appears to be one of the most prominent driving forces behind radicalisation and the jihadi threat in Europe. With criminal and terrorist milieus amalgamating, the crime-terror nexus has become not only a social problem, but a national security issue.

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