

Review - Intersections of Crime and Terror

Written by Robert Bunker

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ROBERT BUNKER, MAR 25 2013

Intersections of Crime and Terror

Edited by James J.F. Forest.

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Initially published as a special issue of *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 24, Iss. 2 (2012).

Intersections of Crime and Terror is a Routledge anthology of hybrid violent non-state actor (VNSA) research that explores the interactions between criminals and terrorists. The editor, Professor Forest of the University of Massachusetts Lowell, is amply qualified to edit this work, due to his current status as a senior fellow with the Joint Special Operations University, and his previous position as the former director of terrorism studies, Combating Terrorism Center, at the U.S. Military Academy, West Point.

The work, which is essentially a collection of peer reviewed thematic articles from the leading scholarly journal of the field— *Terrorism and Political Violence*¹— contains ten chapters, the first two of which present introductory (James J.F. Forest) and conceptual (John T. Picarelli) pieces pertaining to crime and terror interactions. The next eight chapters focus on specific criminal acts/organized criminal and terrorist/terrorism interactions, along with a few

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comparative case studies. The third chapter focuses on Middle Eastern ethnopolitical organizations and their ties to the drug trade (Victor Asal, Kathleen Deloughery, and Brian J. Phillips), while the fourth chapter analyses the opium trade as it is linked to patterns of terrorism in Afghanistan (James A. Piazza). The fifth chapter in the book compares the structures of the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) guerrillas to the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) terrorist group in Turkey (Vera Eccarius-Kelly), and the sixth chapter explores the terrorism and criminal insurgencies versus organized crime debate taking place in Mexico (Phil Williams).

The book's seventh chapter contains a comparative study of the attributes of the Mexican cartels and Middle Eastern terrorist organizations (Shawn Teresa Flanigan), while the eighth chapter focuses on criminal attacks—defined as both terrorist and non-terrorist—perpetrated by radical environmental and animal rights groups in the U.S. between 1970-2007 (Jennifer Varriale Carson, Gary LaFree, and Laura Dugan). The final two chapters, chapters nine and ten, analyse, respectively, the kidnapping activities of the Philippines' Abu Sayyaf Group and how it has fluctuated between criminal and terrorist behavior (McKenzie O'Brien), and the intersections of internet and computer-mediated communications, cyber crime, and internet based terrorism (Thomas J. Holt). These eight chapters utilize methodologies that draw from both qualitative and quantitative disciplines.

The contributors are a diverse group and range from more senior level scholars such as Forest, LaFree and Williams to younger scholars such as O'Brien and Phillips. Mid-career associate level professors are well represented. Notable sections of the work include Phil William's chapter critical of terrorism and criminal insurgency perspectives in the Mexican cartel wars. This chapter was counter-balanced by Flanigan's first rate analysis of the difficulties inherent in comparing terrorism and organized crime. What will be of particular interest to students and scholars alike is this chapter's continuation of the 'great debate' that has been taking place about this issue; experts Phil Williams and Paul Rexton Kan have been squaring off against John Sullivan and I for some time about the challenges of relating terrorism and insurgency to organized crime. With the addition of Flanigan in this volume, this fascinating debate will continue to expand. The Eccarius-Kelly contribution should also be singled out as an intriguing cross-comparison between the FARC's 'wheel structure' and the PKK's 'octopus structure' with its transnational tentacles. The diagrams contained within it are a welcome addition to the chapter as they provide conceptual short-cuts that enable the reader to visually comprehend the processes described.

The positive aspects of the work are various. Most readers will see value in the later eight chapters specifically focused on the criminal and terrorist activities of specific groups and/or the interaction between particular criminal and terrorist groups. These more applied and focused chapters, undoubtedly, will provide useful material for group and process specific researchers, and will offer students valuable insight into the dynamics of specific terrorist and organized criminal entities. Detriments to the work are minor; the absence of some sort of postscript discussing future research avenues and potentials was notable. Given the page limitations, at best an assorted overview of various crime and terrorism interactions could be addressed within the book. Also, like all edited works, the styles of the individual chapter contributions vary markedly. However, since the articles were originally published in a peer reviewed journal a high standard of quality control is nonetheless evident.

The case studies within this book are not necessarily where the true value of the work lies, however. While fewer readers may find the first two chapters of utility because of their theoretical cross-disciplinary nature, by far these were of much more interest to this reviewer. Having recently discussed sections of the initial two chapters written by Forest and Picarelli in a new co-authored work on gangs and cartels (*Studies in Gangs and Cartels*, Forthcoming 2013), I see the value of the work as more of a theoretical one. Emerging scholarship in this field of study is seeking to highlight the attributes of larger threat groups vis-à-vis those of individual violent non-state actor (VNSA) forms—that is, those expressed by criminals, terrorists, gangs, and cartels. Hybrid and complex non-state threat groups—such as Los Zetas found in Mexico and Central America— appear to be where this trend is now heading. Newer cutting edge works, such as *Intersections of Crime and Terror* and others like it, provide valuable tools to scholars conducting research in these budding areas of inquiry.

In summation, *Intersections of Crime and Terror* is an important and worthwhile work that will be of interest to scholars, policymakers, and upper division and graduate students focusing on the intersections of criminal and terrorist activities. The hard copy edition of the book, however, is prohibitively expensive for individual purchase and

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will end up making its way typically only into university libraries.

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Note

1. The other leading terrorism studies journals are *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* and the newer *Critical Studies on Terrorism*.

About the author:

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