

The Crime-Terror Nexus: Ideology's Misleading Role in Islamist Terrorist Groups

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Challenging Current Convictions about the Crime-Terror Nexus: Ideology's Misleading Role in the Analysis of Islamist Terrorist Group Motivations

INTRODUCTION

The prevailing orthodoxy in criminology and terrorism studies maintains that the fundamental distinction between criminal and terrorist organisations lies in their disparate motivations: terrorists are primarily motivated by ideology, whilst criminals are motivated by profit. Recognition of a "crime-terror nexus" has appeared in the literature for the past two decades, but the vast majority of discussions are confined to organisational and operational similarities between terrorist and criminal groups. Such limited explorations of convergence perpetuate the notion that, while they may adopt similar traits between each other, their *raison d'être* remain fundamentally different. This dissertation seeks to answer the following: What are the misconceptions in the analysis of the crime-terror nexus in regards to militant Islamist groups? Additionally, what role does ideology have in modern Islamist terrorist groups today? Finally, is ideology the fundamental motivation of Islamist terrorist groups? The answering of these questions will ultimately divulge whether the crime-terror nexus threat needs reassessment.

This dissertation follows a two-pronged analytical framework. Chapter One takes the first approach and challenges the current notions in the crime-terror nexus, many of which are deeply rooted in the "profit-versus-ideology dichotomy".[1] An organisational analysis reveals that Islamist terrorist groups both engage in alliances with transnational criminal organisations and pursue their own criminal enterprises despite ideological commitments.

Chapter Two introduces the second part of the framework and investigates ideology's current role in Islamist terrorist organisations both on membership and strategic levels. Research on radicalisation processes shows that ideology cannot explain adequately why members join these organisations. Thus, too narrow of a focus on ideology in the analysis of religiously motivated terrorism produces biased conclusions. Like gang members, terrorists value a sense of purpose, identity, adventure, or seek an outlet for anger and revenge. In summation, Islamist terrorist groups are violent gangs, and should be analysed as such. Finally, on a strategic level, the Salafist-Jihadist ideology is actively employed as a means, rather than an end. The ultimate aims of Islamist terrorist groups are to garner power, status, and money in fractionalised, war-torn regions such as Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and parts of Northern and Western Africa.

Chapter Three employs the framework in a case study on Islamic State (ISIS). It first shows that ISIS is heavily steeped in criminal activity and operates like a criminal organisation. Second, identifying the reasons why individuals join ISIS and demonstrating ISIS's exploitation of the Salafist-Jihadist ideology effectively dismantles their status as an ideologically pure group. Instead, ISIS encompasses a multi-million dollar criminal organisation and the most

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dogmatic, violent, and puissant gang in the Middle East.

The profit-versus-ideology dichotomy that distinguishes between criminal and terrorist groups is misleading when applied to modern Islamist terrorist organisations such as ISIS and al Qaeda. The Salafist-Jihadist ideology serves as a disguise for the criminal motivations of money, power, and status. Therefore, the crime-terror nexus threat requires reassessment in order to adapt more appropriately counter-terrorism strategies to Islamist terrorism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Defining the "Crime-Terror Nexus"

The "crime-terror nexus" is a relatively new phenomenon. There have been no efforts to track systematically the interactions between these different types of groups, making it difficult to identify trends. A similar dilemma concerned the illicit trafficking of Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear materials (CBRN), though in 1995, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) successfully launched the Incident and Trafficking Database (ITDB), which tracks the smuggling of radioactive and nuclear materials.[2] A database recording the complex crime-terror interactions would facilitate mapping of trends, and would subsequently contribute to more effective counter-terror measures. Currently, anecdotal histories and inter-disciplinary research from terrorism, criminology, sociology, and other fields, enables scholars to distinguish key trends in the relationship between organised crime and terrorism, as well as the significant gaps in corresponding threat assessments.

The majority of scholarship decidedly places the emergence of the crime-terror nexus after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the dawn of the Information Age.[3] Lack of state funding compelled terrorists to pursue other means of financing whilst information technology and globalisation facilitated communication and coordination between actors.[4] The discussion of the crime-terror nexus has become more complex, scholars having defined three main nexus conditions: cooperation, transformation, and convergence.[5] Pioneer crime-terror nexus researcher, Makarenko developed a "crime-terror continuum" that depicts these main areas. At the furthest ends of the continuum lies *cooperation*, in which criminals and terrorists engage in alliances ranging from less formal, transaction-based agreements (i.e. guns for drugs) to sophisticated coalitions (i.e. coordinating transnational smuggling routes).[6] Then, Makarenko compares the operational and organisational similarities to identify *convergence*, or the process by which groups become *hybrid* organisations that retain both criminal and terrorist qualities.[7] Rather than subjugating one's organisation to the risks involved by collaborating with disparate groups, organisations instead "mutate their own structure and organisation to take on a non-traditional, financial, or political role".[8] Dishman notes that the adoption of in-house capabilities is already one mode of transformation, whereas Makarenko defines true *transformation* when a group's end aims have evolved completely to the other end of the crime-terror continuum.[9]

Despite acknowledgement that motivations can shift, much of the crime-terror nexus analysis stands by the distinction that criminal groups are primarily profit driven, while terrorist groups retain ideological aims. Furthermore, if motivations do shift, the applicable labels of such groups also change. There is no way then to conceptualise an ideologically-driven terrorist group with purely criminal intentions. The hypothesis that terrorist groups sometimes use ideology as a disguise to mask their criminal intentions is the closest academia has come to reconciling this conceptual gap.[10] Nevertheless, policy reports lag in progress; it appears exceptionally difficult for the policymaking community to view terrorist groups first and foremost as criminal organisations.

Additionally, many have compared the extent of the crime-terror nexus according to diverse geographic idiosyncrasies. Makarenko and Ibanez highlight post-conflict and transitional zones with poor border regulation, weak authority, and high rates of corruption as the most vulnerable to situations of symbiotic, long-term collaboration between criminal and terrorist groups. In these regions, such as Somalia, Northern and Western Africa, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the Balkans, it is increasingly difficult to distinguish between these entities.[11] More studies continue to focus on these geographic "hotspots" and the interplay between crime and war. Incidentally, Makarenko

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comments that civil war dynamics are also changing as criminal and terrorist groups “hijack” the political and economic momentum of these conflict regions.[12]

The Jihadi Crime-Terror Nexus

Most studies follow that Islamist organisations adopt the “methods” not the “motives” of criminal groups.[13] Some scholars, however, have begun to question the motivations of some groups such as al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and Abu Sayyaf. In his comparative case study of the Mexican cartel La Familia and Abu Sayyaf, Ballina ultimately concludes that criminal and terrorist groups are capable of simultaneously pursuing what are typically considered two paradoxical aims: entrepreneurial profit and ideological ends.[14] It is a rarity for scholars and political figures alike to go further than mere inference that AQ's *core* membership is invested in criminal enterprises. This is rooted in the idea that leaders would deem criminal association a risk to their ideological credibility.[15] Aronson meanwhile discusses AQIM's increasing persistence with kidnapping for ransom and concludes that their terrorist and criminal motivations are constantly shifting and “fluid”. [16] Nevertheless, the majority of analysis concludes that any relationships between Islamist terrorist groups and organised crime are of an opportunistic nature, and do not represent entrepreneurial pursuits of Islamist extremists.

Current Threat Assessment

Europol's 2012 *Terrorism Situation and Trend Report* makes a soft conclusion about the nexus trend: “The connections between terrorist, violent extremist and organised crime networks *may* become more blurred. Terrorist and violent extremist activities are often financed through crime or organised crime activities. In *some* cases the same individuals who are engaged in terrorism or violent extremism are also involved in organised crime activities.”[17] In tandem with the terrorism report, the 2011 Europol *Organised Crime Threat Assessment* feebly refers to the “*possible* links between drug traffickers and terrorist groups”. [18] Since 9/11, the U.S. Treasury, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and the Department of Defense (DOD) have reoriented their focus particularly towards the illicit financing and smuggling operations of terrorist groups. Since 2005, however, there has not been one congressional hearing regarding the crime-terror nexus.[19] Lastly, any discussion on counter-strategies solely revolve around operational aspects of the crime-terror nexus to the detriment of other potential counter-strategies. One such strategy is an aggressive counter-narrative strategy that divulges the “impure” motivations of Islamist organisations.

METHODOLOGY

In order to identify the scope of the crime-terror nexus, one must develop a useful analytical framework. For the sake of clarity, a two-pronged model allows one to conceptualise the degree to which Islamist terrorist organisations are converging with criminal groups. The first part of the two-pronged model is a critical analysis of current notions of the crime-terror nexus in regards to Islamist terrorist organisations. Using existing literature on the crime-terror nexus, the analysis will illustrate a clear picture of the Islamist crime-terror nexus, which will dismantle current notions rooted in the “profit-versus-ideology dichotomy”. The latter part of the two-pronged model is an investigative analysis on the role of ideology in a sample of well-established Islamist terrorist organisations. It draws on literature on radicalisation and gangs to show ideology's minor role in the joining of Islamist groups. Ultimately, this examination will suggest that the true motivations of Islamist terrorist groups today are that of criminal organisations, and therefore, crime-terror threat analysis requires reorientation. Finally, this framework is used to assess the so-called Islamic State as the case illustrates the multiple degrees of organisational and motivational convergence of modern jihadist terrorist groups with criminal groups.

Chapter One provides a critical analysis based on current conceptions in the crime-terror nexus literature. In order to do this, it illustrates the scope of the Islamist crime-terror nexus. First explaining the similarities in organisational

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structure sets the foundation for understanding how these groups organisationally and conceptually converge. Then the analysis focuses on two areas of nexus; Collaboration, and activity appropriation. Substantial historical cases including Al Qaeda and affiliates, Hezbollah, and the Taliban and their relationships with a multitude of criminal actors around the globe will show the extensive relationship between Islamist terror and organised crime. This application of the crime-terror nexus will drive the critical analysis of the current arguments made that these groups will not associate with each other, and that Islamist terrorist groups will not engage in criminal activity because of ideological disparities.

Chapter Two employs the second prong of the model—an investigative analysis on the true motivations of Islamist terrorist organisations and the role that ideology plays within these groups. First, the analysis will show the minor role of ideological motivation within Islamist group dynamics. Research on radicalisation demonstrates the many reasons for joining extremist groups other than ideology. The literature on gang behaviour supports the hypothesis that these Islamist terrorist groups are essentially violent gangs, albeit highly sophisticated and transnational. Interviews with gang members and jihadists highlight coinciding motivations. Additionally, prison radicalisation studies exemplify the role of prison gang culture in the radicalisation of the incarcerated to Islamism, and demonstrate that the Salafi-Jihadist ideology is not the paramount motivation among group dynamics.

Second, the analysis will define ideology's *active* role in militant Islamist groups as a means to an end. Citations from fatwas and other sources that justify criminal activity contribute to this argument. This chapter concludes that threat analysis should not focus so extensively on ideology as it misleadingly distinguishes between Islamist terrorist groups from what they actually are—violent criminal gangs whose true aims are the acquisition of power, money, and status.

Finally, Chapter Three applies the two-pronged analytical approach to ISIS to illustrate the degree of organisational and motivational convergence in one of today's most significant Salafist-Jihadist groups. News articles and statements given by national security members heavily acknowledge ISIS's involvement in criminal enterprises. Financial data alone reflects that ISIS has fully adapted crime in their modus operandi. The criminal profile of ISIS will be seen to fit fully the contours of the crime-terror nexus as illustrated in Chapter One. Then, the second investigative approach is applied. Testimonials of ISIS defectors highlight non-ideological reasons for joining. A discussion on the particular brand of jihadist culture, which has taken on a "gangster" profile, demonstrates that some followers join for gang-like reasons (i.e. bravado, status, sense of belonging), rather than for the Salafi-Jihadist ideology. Lastly, a relevant discussion on ISIS strategy revolving around territory, sophisticated propaganda campaigns, and ideological innovations to legitimise crime demonstrates the role of ideology not as a motivational end goal, but as a means to garner power, money, and status.

CHAPTER 1. Setting the Record Straight: The Criminal Profile of Islamist Organisations

Much of the crime-terror nexus literature pertains to the growing operational and organisational similarities between criminal and terrorist groups. These groups have evolved to a network structure of organisation, thereby enabling these "netwarriors" to pose as national security threats. The shift to a network structure has developed the crime-terror nexus in two other areas: 1) Collaboration and 2) Activity appropriation. Significant cases such as al Qaeda (AQ) and affiliates, Hezbollah, and the Taliban reveal a long established history with criminal organisations. Additionally, these organisations have pursued their own criminal enterprises that span the globe. This chapter scrutinises the weaknesses of current convictions of the Islamist crime-terror nexus, which are often rooted in the notion that profit-motivated criminals and ideologically-driven terrorists are irreconcilable concepts.

1.1. "The Trifecta Threat"

According to Navy Lieutenant-Commander Keenan, Transnational Criminal Organisations (TCOs), Drug Trafficking Organisations (DTOs), and Islamic extremists are forming a transnational, "trifecta" threat in which they each

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participate in an ever developing mode of conflict called fourth generation warfare (4GW).[20] First coined in 1989, Lind used 4GW to define a decentralised form of conflict that is waged on a societal, economic, political, and psychological level.[21] Arquilla and Ronfeldt supply the term “netwar” instead to emphasize the organisational revolution of 4GW: the network.[22] The network is what enables this trifecta threat to come to fruition. Arquilla and Ronfeldt observe three characteristics that networks possess: 1) Informal, non-uniform relationships that vary in duration and intensity between which coordination and communication takes places on a situational, not hierarchical basis, 2) Extra-organisational nodes that are often transnational, and 3) Shared norms and values that govern organisational functioning rather than formal decrees.[23] As “netwarriors”, criminal organisations, extremist groups, and gangs pose an unconventional threat to nation-states, especially if they are converging in networks.[24] A brief description of how organised crime groups and terrorist organisations have evolved will show the modern comparability in structure between these groups.

Third Generation Gangs and Organised Crime

The National Alliance of Gang Investigators' Association defines a gang as

a group or association of three or more persons who may have a common identifying sign, symbol, or name and who individually or collectively engage in, or have engaged in, criminal activity which creates an atmosphere of fear and intimidation.[25]

Gangs are not equivalent to criminal organisations, albeit they are related. The latter is distinguishable by a higher level of organisation and more criminal diversification.[26] The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime defines organised crime as

a structured group of three or more persons, existing for a period of time and acting in concert with the aim of committing one or more serious crimes or offences established . . . in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit.[27]

Traditional examples of organised crime are the Italian, Sicilian, and Russian Mafiosi, the Japanese Yakuza, and the Chinese Triads. The Latin American drug cartels are an example of market-focused organised crime.[28]

Though most criminal gangs do not evolve into sophisticated criminal organisations, Sullivan and Bunker use the degree of “politicisation”, “internationalisation”, and “sophistication” as parameters to explain the evolution of some gangs into organised crime entities. While *first generation* gangs are turf-oriented and opportunistic, *second generation* gangs inhabit intra- or international spaces, are entrepreneurially-oriented, market-focused, and sometimes have politicised aims. *Third generation* gangs (3G2) “are the most complex gangs and they operate—or aspire to operate—at the global end of the spectrum, using their sophistication to garner power, aid financial acquisition and engage in mercenary-type activities”. [29] Sullivan and Bunker conclude that “a third-generation gangster is a fully realized netwarrior”. [30] Most commonly cited as a 3G2 is Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13). MS-13 emerged out of the civil war-torn diaspora of El Salvadorian immigrants in the 1980s and has grown to such sophistication that they often are referred to as “criminal insurgents”. [31] Alternatively, the Honduran government has designated them a terrorist organisation. [32] Others include the Black P Stones (El Rukn) and M-18. Renken's compiled table of 3G2s identifies the Mexican DTOs as marking “high” in politicisation, sophistication (“Network Structure”), and internationalisation. [33]

Shelley et al notes that criminal groups are comparable to their terrorist underworld counterparts: “Most organised crime now operates not as a hierarchy but as a decentralised, loose-knit network—which is a crucial similarity to terror groups.” [34] Organised criminal groups are reaching new areas of the globe by connecting with each other, and introducing new clientele i.e. terrorists. A *Congressional Research Service* report indicates that criminal organisations are increasing in “size, scope, and ambition”. [35] For example, Sub-Saharan Africa is an established milieu of Latin American drug cartel activity and prominent Islamist extremist groups AQIM, Boko Haram (BH), and al-Shabaab. [36] The structural evolution of organised crime has both expanded the crime-terror nexus by making organised illicit enterprises available to terrorists, as well as by connecting organised crime groups with terrorists.

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Islamist Terror Groups

The evolving structure of jihadist terror today perhaps is the most recognised national security threat. AQ is the most notable example of this structural transformation from a hierarchical to a network organisation. Since 9/11, AQ central has downsized by seventy percent.[37] Documents procured from the raid in Abbottabad reveal that as of 2011, there were 170 core members remaining. Furthermore, counter-terrorism measures have compelled the group to decentralise. Experts debate the organisational essence of AQ, arguing that it retains some hierarchical strategic direction and operates as a sophisticated network, or that it is a fragmented organisation made up of “disconnected regional movements that have little connection with each other”.[38] AQ's network comprises of affiliates that assume the mantle of the global jihadi cause, but direct their operations locally.[39] Indeed, Sageman argues that AQ presently is “just a loose label for a movement that seems to target the west”.[40] Aside from AQ central and its affiliates, Sageman's “leaderless jihad” hypothesis explains another level to AQ's evolved structure. The jihadist movement, rather than led by an organisation, is largely an organic grass-roots movement. Sageman instead, characterises terrorist groups as cells consisting of a much more transient membership base, of whose reasons for joining are due to social group processes.[41]

Network Convergence

The shift to networks has made it difficult to distinguish structurally between these groups. In a region where non-state actors are waging 4GW, criminal groups and terrorists or insurgents are connected to the same overall threat. Makarenko refers to this convergence as the “black hole syndrome”. Civil warring groups, whose motivations shift from the political to the criminal, take over failed states and thus are in a position to perpetuate civil war conditions for economic and political gains.[42] These groups take advantage in environments of faltering infrastructure, weak governance, poverty and a disenfranchised population. Makarenko ultimately concludes that modern civil wars today are a representation of crime-terror convergence. She writes, “they [civil wars] have evolved from wars fought for ideological or religious motivations to wars hijacked by criminal interests and secured by terror tactics.”[43] She diagnoses countries such as Afghanistan, Myanmar, Angola, Sierra Leone, and Tajikistan with the “black hole syndrome”.[44] Northern Nigeria for example hosts a population that has long been drowning in poverty, unemployment, and government instability—prime conditions for insurgencies, terrorism, and criminal epidemics.[45] Amidst these conditions, illicit gun trade and “frustrated youth” continue to supply various insurgent groups. Georges infers that although the deprived population is attracted to the insurgents' “warped ideological narrative”, they also are attracted to the economic gains available now that these terrorist organisations are investing themselves in organised criminal networks.[46]

Ciudad d'Este, the tri-border city between Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina, is another region that is symptomatic of increasingly blurred lines between crime and war. Known as “Smuggler's Paradise”, Ciudad D'Este is a virtually lawless zone absent of border and trade regulation, and a conspicuous case of a complex crime-terror nexus.[47] The triangle can arguably be considered the first trans-Atlantic safe-haven for Islamist terrorist groups, notably for Hezbollah and AQ operatives.[48] In regions where Islamist terrorist groups operate, organised crime and terrorism thrive together, and are so intertwined, that it is difficult to distinguish between ideologically and criminally motivated violence. The next section will illustrate the first area of the crime-terror nexus.

1.2. Collaboration/Alliance

As criminal and terrorist groups have grown into transnational entities and diversified their enterprises and clientele, it is inevitable that they will come into direct contact. The principal assumption on the collaboration between terrorists and criminals is that they will *not* work together due to their ideological differences and the presumable risks they would bring to the professional relationship. Bove-LaMonica recognises the United States government's feeble acknowledgement of collaboration:

Although the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) suggests there are as many as 18 specific foreign terrorist organisations linked to the global drug trade, most U.S. policy makers refrain from linking these organisations, like Al-Qaeda, to criminal networks. Research shows that the international community is historically reluctant to do anything

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more than speculate on Al-Qaeda involvement in organized crime, employing the caveat that the organisation was founded on strong ideological principles inherently different than criminal organisations.[49]

Those that do recognise collaboration characterise it as sporadic, short-term, and opportunistic. Additionally, the current restrictive environment (i.e. counter-terrorism measures, lack of state funding, etc.) serves as their explanation as to why these groups resort to alliances or the development of in-house capabilities.[50] For instance, the Canadian Centre for Intelligence and Security Studies upholds the principle assumption based on ideological disparities as well as the predication that these relationships exist only for logistical and tactical convenience given the restrictive operational environment. Furthermore, long-term alliances are a very rare phenomenon and are not likely to be a future trend.[51] On the contrary, there have been significant, global alliances between Islamist organisations and criminal groups. Such historical bedrock of the crime-terror nexus supports the conclusion that collaboration of all degrees—short-term and long-term—is undeniably occurring. Moreover, the existence of these relationships suggests that ideological disparities are not inhibiting collaboration.

To begin, one needs to demonstrate how unconventional collaboration occurs in today's modern threat environment. As a result of the structural shift to decentralised, flatter networks, relationships between organisations no longer come into fruition by concrete directives from up top.[52] Relationships occur more organically now. A nod to Sageman's term, Dishman refers to the "leaderless nexus" to explain how the network form of terrorist groups and criminal groups has led to further crime-terror convergence.[53] He hypothesises that mid- and low-level leaders of dispersed cells increasingly pursue previously censored relationships, which eventually evolve into long-term, synergistic collaboration.[54] More "mid-level" and "low-level" jihadists are making the decisions, even though they may seem to act contrary to strategic objectives. Herein lies the weakness of networks. Some of these low-level decisions are short-sighted, and may even act contrary to the strategic vision of core leaders.[55] According to Rollins et al, the "the core leadership" of prominent terrorist groups (i.e. Hezbollah and AQ) "are not known to be *significantly* partnered with [TCOs]" because they want to avoid increased attention from governments and security breaches, or they do not wish to engage in ideologically contradictory criminal activities. [56] The "leaderless nexus" however, illustrates the diminishing role of the core leadership. Relationships occur between smaller, dispersed nodes among low-level members. Governments should not expect to witness Joaquin Guzmán and al-Zawahiri rendezvousing in the caves of Afghanistan.[57] This does not mean that "significant partnerships" are not occurring. There are numerous criminal-terrorist linkages occurring between nodes that all together cast a wide net-threat.

Demonstrating the point is an example that the literature has almost completely neglected—the allegations that AQ and the Sicilian Mafia have been collaborating together. Italy's political crime unit estimates that over one thousand AQ operatives have passed through Italy, most likely with the help of the Camorra (Napolese Mafia). Additionally, the Camorra has taught these operatives the art of document forgery.[58] This tactical and logistical relationship may represent a miniscule pocket of the global jihadist threat. That said, policymakers must account for the current realities of netwar. Small scale relationships between non-state actors, empowered by information technologies and networked communication, can pose a formidable threat. AQ operatives, with a very limited degree of collaboration with Italian Mafiosi, have been able to expand their networks throughout Europe.

There are also relationships of a more strategic and symbiotic nature between organisations. These represent more than opportunistic grabs, but rather the entrepreneurial pursuits of notable Islamist organisations. AQIM is a relevant example of the well-established collaborative history between Islamist and criminal groups. The antecedent of AQIM, the Salafi Group for Call and Combat (GSPC), had ties to Algerian and Moroccan criminal organisations since its inception in 1992. According to Scheuer, these organised crime groups provided continuous monetary and arms support to the Algerian insurgents for over a decade.[59] Islamist terrorist groups in the Maghreb, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia are among the poorest as they do not receive much private funding from donors in the region. Consequently, they have long depended on criminality for funding, whether it originates from the "petty theft" of the European diaspora, or from profitable cooperation with sophisticated criminal organisations.[60] In 2007, GSPC assumed the name of AQIM, and AQ, through network affiliation, gained access to a mature relationship with North African organised crime.

Other criminal groups are now gravitating to the region. A DEA report on the arrest of three individuals reveals the

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complex and multi-partied nature of the criminal-terrorist nexus emerging in the Maghreb and Sahel regions. The DEA reports, "The charges stem from the defendant's alleged agreement to transport cocaine through West and North Africa with the intent to support *three* terrorist organisations—Al Qaeda, [AQIM] and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia ("FARC")."[61] The individuals, who were AQ supporters, agreed to help FARC operatives in transporting cocaine from West Africa to Europe through Spain. DEA Acting Administrator Michele Leonhart warns, "[These] allegations reflect the emergence of a worrisome alliance between [AQ] and transnational narcotics traffickers." [62] Judging by the complex crime-terror relationships throughout the Maghreb and the Sahel regions, it is clear that ideology has not stopped these groups from interacting with each other, and establishing mutually beneficial, long-term relationships.

According to assumption, Jihadist groups apparently bring unwanted risks to the business rapport. After 9/11, when the United States had declared the "war on terror", the crime-terror nexus only expanded. Despite the presumable risks of the vigorous United States military agenda, AQ still proved a viable business option for prominent TCOs. Cyberspace perhaps shows the earliest symptoms of an expanding crime-terror nexus. A news article from *Future Intelligence* reports that after 9/11, AQ sought immediate help from the Russian mafia to move funds and "develop extremist websites". [63] The Russian gangs agreed to launder and transfer funds, supposedly charging a seventy-five percent interest fee due to the possible risks incurred. [64] The Russians, notorious for their cyber capacities, did not avoid America's most sought after terrorist organisation.

Neither did Mara Salvatrucha, (MS-13). Williams in *the al Qaeda Connection*, details an elaborate relationship between the transnational gang and AQ. He explains,

By 2002 the most notorious terrorist organisation in the world came to a financial agreement with the most violent street gang on the American continent [...] In exchange for safe passage across the border, shelter within the states, and a bogus *matricula consular*, al Qaeda—through its cells in South America—agreed to pay Mara Salvatrucha from \$30,000 to \$50,000 for each sleeper agent. [65]

MS-13 agreed to utilise their human and drug smuggling routes to conceal AQ operatives across the Mexican-American border. In response to this relationship, the Honduran government cracked down with a zero-tolerance policy, making the membership of MS-13 illegal and a punishable crime worth twelve years in prison. [66] Nevertheless, this law did not dissuade the gang from engaging with their new clients. Instead, MS-13 responded by "beheading scores of victims and leaving notes on the bodies for the Honduran government." [67] Though there is no definitive evidence that any AQ operatives have successfully crossed the Mexican-American border, eye witness accounts in 2004 confirmed the presence of at least one significant AQ extremist, residing in what is now called "terrorist ally" in the Northern Province of Sonora. Adnan el-Shukrijumah, who had risen to a commanding rank in AQ, was first identified in Honduras at a restaurant—dining with four MS-13 chiefs from Panama, El Salvador, Mexico, and the Honduras. [68]

Current threat assessments underestimate the risk TCOs and 3G2s like MS-13 are willing to take. Profit is a powerful motivation. In an interview with MS-13 member Felix Ortega, Williams asks why the gang is willing to associate with AQ. Ortega's answer: "Money. That is the reason for everything." [69] Similarly stated, a former FBI agent reports that a cooperating "high-level Mafia figure" said the Mafia would have no qualms about helping terrorists smuggle people into Europe—"The Mafia will help whoever can pay." [70] Islamist terrorist groups appear to be viable clients for multiple TCOs. To these groups, the risks are worth it.

Lastly, it is important to recall the predication made that these inter-organisational relationships come to fruition because the counter-terror environment thwarts ongoing, traditional Islamist terror operations. In other words, Islamist terrorist groups are compelled to seek alliances as a last resort. Suggesting otherwise, today's most relevant Islamist terrorist groups (i.e. AQ, Hezbollah, and Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan) began associating with organised crime even when they had abundant state funding and a relatively stable safe haven. Undeniably, terrorism is an expensive venture; like any business start-up, terrorists require vast amounts of money. That said, it is a valid assessment that these organisations, "founded on strong ideological principles", were also founded upon sturdy linkages to criminal organisations. [71]

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The Shia Islamist group Hezbollah, for example, was born into Lebanon's 1970s and 1980s narcotics boom. Lebanon (particularly the Bekaa Valley) was the leading producer of marijuana in the Middle East.[72] Just a few years after the 1978 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, Hezbollah established itself, largely recruiting from the Bekaa Valley tribes. Cilluffo of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) maintains that the Bekaa Valley serves as Hezbollah's main base for narcotics operations.[73] Meanwhile, according to the DEA, Lebanese Colombians and Lebanese Shia in Lebanon have had established connections since the 1980s. These ties have only expanded, with Lebanese diaspora members being the kingpins of drug rings across South America. In an operation in 2007, an undercover DEA agent managed to gain the trust of drug ring leader Chekry Harb. Over a two year period, the agent collected intelligence on drug routes and recipients, while he alone laundered twenty million dollars during his operation.[74] Harb's enterprise reportedly contributed twelve percent of Hezbollah's total income from narcotics. This elaborate business unfolded in the midst of receiving substantial state sponsorship from Iran. Levitt states, "Iran has long been believed to fund Hezbollah to the tune of at least \$100 million per year." [75] Analysts currently estimate that Iran bestows up to \$200 million per year to Hezbollah. The picture is clear—from its birth in the early 1980s to this day, Hezbollah was and is founded on supposedly ideological principles, but equally so on criminal entrepreneurialism.

1.3. Activity Appropriation

Not only do terrorists collaborate with organised crime groups, but they conduct their own criminal operations as well. Mandel observes, among the different violent actors—criminals, warlords, terrorist, and insurgents—"Criminal activities have become the common denominator." [76] This last section demonstrates that Islamist jihadist groups will invest themselves in virtually any illicit market in order to generate money. Given the sheer quantity of criminal activity involvement among jihadist organisations, ideology does not appear to restrict Islamist extremist groups in the least.

Government awareness of Islamist organised crime has increased in the last decade, yet, underestimation characterises the analysis of the true extent of Islamist terrorist involvement in criminal enterprises. While after 2001, the U.S Treasury, the FBI, and the UN reoriented counter-terrorist financing measures, they do not cover the whole gamut of terrorist financing. Indicative of this is the fact that AQ in Iraq (AQI), what is now the Islamic State, was fully self-funded and resilient by 2006.[77] Analysis of documents from the Department of Defense's Harmony Database indicates that "outside donations amounted to a tiny fraction—no more than 5 percent—of the group's operating budgets from 2005 until 2010." [78] Counter-terrorism measures appear to suffer from significant lag time.

The criminal profile of Islamists groups is quite substantive and diverse. An expert group for the UN Office on Drugs and Crime states,

[...] terrorist groups are frequently involved in other crimes, particularly illegal drug trafficking, smuggling of migrants, falsification of travel and identity documents, trafficking in firearms and exploitation of illegal markets, inter alia, to support their activities.[79]

In addition to these enterprises, extortion is a staple modus operandi among prominent groups including Al-Shabaab, BH, AQIM, and ISIS. The UN Security Council Monitoring Group lists extortion and taxation as al-Shabaab's largest income source (\$70 to \$100 million annually), whilst "diaspora support" and "external assistance" contribute the smallest amount of funds.[80] The Sahel region shows an increased threat of kidnapping for ransom (KFR). Pantucci claims that AQIM's ransom money pays for food, clothing, and weapons, as well as covers bribes for the local tribes.[81] A Senior Fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute indicates the supply-demand sophistication of the kidnapping outfit in the Sahel, as local gangs now kidnap victims and put them up for sale to Islamist terrorist groups.[82] Most recent reporting is occupied with the "gangland-style shakedowns" of ISIS. Chapter Three's case study will reveal ISIS's extensive funding from extortion rackets, illicit trafficking of oil, looting, and bank robbing.[83]

One particular illicit market—heroin—exemplifies the sophisticated entrepreneurial capacity of modern day Islamist terrorist groups. The Taliban's involvement with Afghanistan's heroin trade, though only one example, has global impact, and involves many actors. The story of the Taliban and heroin is one of a systematic takeover of an entire

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country's illegal drug market and the establishment of a global DTO. Ron Moreau of *Newsweek* labels the Taliban as the new "Drug Mafia" of Afghanistan. Afghanistan has been the number one producer of the world's heroin since the 1990s, the crop now comprising an estimated forty to fifty percent of the country's GDP.[84] Muhammad Abdali, head of Afghanistan's anti-drug task force claims that the Taliban has deep roots in Afghanistan's heroin product. He specifically names two of the Taliban's most powerful commanders, Akhtar Mohammad Mansoor and Mullah Dadullah Akhund (now deceased) who "were already thriving drug dealers back in 1994, just as the Taliban movement was launching."[85]

The Taliban could never have developed Afghanistan's sophisticated drug enterprise without Osama bin Laden. Williams accounts for bin Laden's early solidification with Taliban leader Mullah Omar (now deceased) in 1996. Before arriving in Afghanistan, bin Laden visited Albania to set up AQ training bases in the Balkans, and also to meet with the Turkish *bubas*, or drug lords. The Turks for almost half a century oversaw the heroin trade from Afghanistan to Iran and then to Bulgaria, while the Sicilian Mafia then shipped the product to Greece and Yugoslavia, and then to Western Europe. [86] Just after bin Laden and Mullah established a partnership, bin Laden once again met with the *bubas* in Albania "in order to usurp the control of the global narcotics trade from the Sicilian Mafia." [87] While the Taliban commandeered the entire supply end of heroin in Afghanistan, the Albanians forged new smuggling routes, and effectively ousted the Sicilians from heroin trade in the Balkans. Moreau observes the core Taliban leaders' further investment into the "upstream and downstream sides of the heroin and opium trade". [88] They are involved in every stage of production, from cultivation to shipment overseas. [89] The heroin case demonstrates more than a mere "opportunistic" approach of Islamist terrorist groups to the illicit drug trade. Instead, the Taliban and AQ exhibited an aggressive entrepreneurial motivation, equal to that of any criminal organisation.

In addition to militant Islamist organisations' global-scale investments, analysts highlight the increased use of criminal modus operandi of jihadi cells and home-grown terrorists in Western countries. [90] Indeed, AQ provides a training manual containing instructions for certain criminal activities including counterfeiting and forgery. [91] A recent analysis on the finance of European jihadi cells confirmed that 'personal assets' represent the most prevalent source of funding, with criminal activities the second at 38 per cent. [92] One such example is the Madrid bombing in which a Moroccan drug dealer financed the entire operation by exchanging hashish and ecstasy for explosives. According to Rollins and Wyler, authorities conducted one of the largest drug seizures in Spain's history when they confiscated thousands of ecstasy tablets. [93] The crime-terror nexus has expanded into the very homes of zealous jihadists. Judging from what the Spanish authorities found, it is increasingly difficult to distinguish between career criminals and jihadist terrorists when it comes to analysis of the home-grown jihadist threat.

This chapter demonstrated how Islamist terrorist organisations fit the current contours of the crime-terror nexus. The examples above reveal that today's generation of Islamist terrorist groups have fully indoctrinated organised crime. Indeed, as Rid acknowledges,

One of the [Salafi-Jihadist] ideology's most vital functions appears to be to resolve the contradictions of jihad in the 21st century: being a pious Muslim, yet attacking women and children; upholding the authority of the Qur'an, yet prospering from crime; depending on Western welfare states, yet plotting against them; having no personal ties to any Islamic group, yet believing oneself to be part of one. [94]

The argument that ideological disparities still inhibit collaboration or criminal activity appropriation among Islamist terrorist groups simply does not hold today. The next chapter will investigate the ideological motivations of Islamist terrorist groups and strive to demonstrate the true role ideology plays in these groups.

CHAPTER 2. Assessing Ideological Motivations

Chapter Two investigates the role of the religio-political Salafist ideology in militant Islamist organisations. The analysis in the first section, drawing from radicalisation research and gang theory, reveals that the motivations for

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which individuals join Islamist terrorist groups vary in a number of ways, many relating to the sense of identity, purpose, adventure, and money. The paramount motivation for joining is not grounded in the Salafist ideology, but rather rooted in a matrix of internal and external influencing factors reinforced by group dynamics. In the second section, the analysis continues to identify the ways in which ideology is actively used as a means, and does not represent the end goal. The true motivations for today's significant Islamist terrorist groups are similar to that of criminal groups—power, money, and status.

2.1. *Why Join? Ideology's Diminishing Value in Jihadi Group Dynamics*

A Social Analytical Lens

First it is necessary to place gangs and terrorist groups in a wider social context. Both groups represent violent *subcultures*. Subcultures consist of marginalised cultural groups that retain behavioural norms, values, motivations, and beliefs different from normative society. Pioneer gang researcher Cohen theorises that gang subcultures emerge as “social solutions” to societal grievances.[95] Similarly, Black hypothesises that terrorist groups emerge as a form of “social control”.[96] As two group-based social solutions, terrorist groups and gangs represent similar phenomena. Decker and Pyrooz observe,

Gangs seem to be quite effective at fulfilling a variety of symbolic functions—including friendship, revenge, and peer affiliation—that are largely independent of instrumental concerns such as making money or achieving political or religious ends. In this regard, gangs resemble terrorist groups, whose members are often attracted by the opportunities for peer affiliation.[97]

Both terrorist and gang group dynamics exhibit comparable social functions. Decker and Pyrooz also state, “Gangs often lack effective mechanisms for controlling behaviour, so they haven't evolved into more formal organisations that could foster terror or be targets for increased radicalisation.”[98] It is relevant to recall the phenomenon of Third Generation Gangs (3G2). Reiterating the definition, 3G2s constitute “the most complex gangs and they operate—or aspire to operate—at the global end of the spectrum, using their sophistication to garner power, aid financial acquisition and engage in mercenary-type activities”.[99] 3G2s bridge the conceptual gap from basic gang formations to sophisticated criminal or terrorists groups. Essentially 3G2s *do* equip “effective mechanisms” for controlling gang behaviour. Their subculture has a number of controlling norms i.e. initiation rites, codes, and ranking systems. They exhibit cultural “artefacts” like tattoos, uniforms, and gang signs. Violence and crime become pragmatic and symbolic values within a group's identity. Cottee explains how stealing is as much an instrumental act, but also “it is an activity valued for its own sake, for its own pleasures and satisfactions.”[100] 3G2s, though very sophisticated and exponentially more violent than street gangs, are gangs in social theoretical terms. Incidentally, violence and crime for 3G2s retain a high symbolic value, that when committed, binds the group closer together.

Terrorist groups are gangs as well. Sageman's “bunch of guys” hypothesis furthers the notion that social bonds characterise terrorist groups, just as they do gangs.[101] Summarily, ideology does not alone constitute the “effective mechanisms”, or as Quiggin of the *Terrorism Research Initiative* calls, “the glue”, by which extremists unite under one Islamist identity and direct violence towards a cause.[102] The explanations of terrorist group dynamics pertain much more to gang behaviour and social subcultural theory.

Despite this plausible theoretical framework, Schmid and Pierce point out the “surprisingly few studies” that investigate radicalisation to terrorism and the joining of organised crime groups as comparable phenomena.[103] Analysing Jihadists groups first and foremost as a product of social group dynamics in which the behaviours are reinforced through high levels of organisation and subcultural maintenance ultimately yields the best analytical results.

Jihadism as a Global Gang Subculture

Jihadism, though an especially violent extremist religio-political ideology, suits the same social diagnostics. Cottee proposes that AQ and affiliates as well as other jihadist groups in the west “represent a collective subcultural solution

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to social strains experienced by the individuals who form or join these groups.”[104] Referencing Sageman, Cottee recalls that the third wave of “wannabe jihadists” are often lower in socio-economic class, younger, less educated, more westernised, and less pious.[105] Many of these characteristics match the general profile of gang members who often belong to unstable families, live in neighbourhoods of low socio-economic class, and perform poorly in school.[106] Individuals with such internal characteristics are vulnerable to these extreme “social solutions”. Decker and Pyrooz cite particular “push and pull factors” for the joining of gangs such as a need for protection, a sense of adventure and excitement, sense of belonging, and elevation of status.[107] In regards to terrorist groups, “Religious fervour rarely has much to do with what draws people to join such groups [...] Deep down, it’s about purpose. Belonging. Excitement. A sense of identity. Order amid disorder. A focus for pent-up rage.”[108] The internal watch points of gang and terrorist individuals coincide to a considerable degree. Moreover, religious zeal does not appear to be highly integral to the radicalisation process, or at least it does not represent the paramount condition.

Notable critics Horgan and Atran warn against the narrow analytic scope that links “radicalisation” directly to violent terrorist acts.[109] Horgan claims, “The idea that radicalisation causes terrorism is perhaps the greatest myth alive today in terrorism research [...First], the overwhelming majority of people who hold radical beliefs do not engage in violence. And second, there is increasing evidence that people who engage in terrorism don’t necessarily hold radical beliefs.”[110] This suggests that ideology has a misplaced role in the analysis of the Islamist crime-terror nexus threat.

“Prislam”

Prisons provide a relevant example in which to study the variables (i.e. internal motivations, external factors, and gang dynamics) that contribute to the process of radicalisation. Prisons are environments where gangs and radical ideas thrive. Recent trends suggest an increasing threat of radicalisation [to Islamism] in prisons.[111] The threat termed “prislam” pertains to “‘gang-like cliques’ that use cut-and-paste versions of the Qur’an to give a religious layer and justification to their violent and criminal activities.”[112] Prisons then present a unique opportunity, a micro-environment, in which violent gang subcultures and radical Islamism collide.

Cilluffo of the Homeland Security Policy Institute notes that radicalisation in prison is nothing new, that “prisons have always been an incubator for radical ideas”. [113] Current trends show that the number of conversions to Islam have increased as well as the conversion to radical Islamism. Moreover, the lapse in time between conversion and radicalisation has decreased, with some members converting immediately to the most radical version of the religion.[114] According to Sinai, various internal and “situational” factors contribute to radicalisation within prisons.[115] Prison gangs, he says, facilitate the radicalisation process. In agreement, Goldman states, “While prisoners can be ‘converted’ and radicalised by terrorist inmates in Western countries, it is much more likely that prisoners will be radicalised through Muslim gangs.”[116]

More often than not, the reasons for which some prisoners convert to radical Islam are not ideological, but because of the already present gang dynamics and strong social bonds. Intrinsically, inmates want to feel a sense of purpose, belonging, and safety. According to Hamm’s research, most inmates convert because “they are in personal crisis, seek a spiritual dimension, are looking for a group to protect them, want to manipulate the system, or are influenced by the outside world.”[117] Gangs provide these needs. Moreover, Muslim gangs are assuming dominance in the “markets” of these needs. Reports claim Muslim gangs are “taking over” within prison institutions.[118] For instance, Muslim gangs have asserted control over cell phone and cigarette smuggling within prison walls.[119] Though in “prison-cellular” form, power dynamics are equally at play in prisons as they are in the outside world. According to a 2011 study on Whitemoor’s prisoner relationships,

There were some intimidating ‘heavy players’ among the Muslim population, who appeared to be orchestrating prison power dynamics rather than propagating or following the faith. Many physically powerful prisoners ‘re-established their outside identities’ as leaders in the prison and used their (newly acquired) faith status as a tool for establishing influence.[120]

In addition, others are attracted to the material benefits that Muslim prison gang-life can provide, such as better food

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options and free cell time for praying rituals.[121]

Pure religious intentions, or the belief in the radical Salafist ideology itself, seem markedly absent in prison environments. Dr. Saathoff's testimony during a Senate Committee Hearing on prison radicalisation observed that after 9/11, over one third of the inmates cheered at the recent strike at the United States. They had no religion in common, he says, rather a "vulnerability to radicalisation".[122] This suggests that various ideologies in highly contested, gang environments function as an outlet for members for their frustrations and rage provoked by external circumstances. In parallel, it is used by certain groups as a tool to channel a target population's disgruntlements in order to harvest power.

According to Sinai, "Prislam" is supposedly "unique to prisons" because the religion is intertwined with "the values of gang loyalty and violence".[123] This micro-scale example, however, can be applied to macro-level environments, particularly extremely fractionalised, war-torn societies. Instead of prison yards, there are large swaths of territory in the Middle East. Instead of illicit cell phone and cigarette prison markets, there are the global illicit drug and oil trades. In lieu of prison gangs are highly sophisticated, transnational 3G2s who compete in a high stakes environment for money, status, and power.

Accounts "From the Ground"

Outside the prison, accounts from jihadists and Western foreign fighters bring insight to the true motivations for which they fight for jihadist groups. These motivations are again, similar to the motivations of gang members, and are not ideologically oriented. One report identified that sixteen out of the twenty-three foreign fighters interviewed had not been religious, but rather the motive for going was driven by "an emotional response to injustices perpetrated by an outside group." [124] Indeed one special report studied a group of over two thousand AQ youth fighters who identified as either revenge, status, identity, or thrill seekers.[125] Over thirty percent identified as "revenge seekers". Moreover, those angry and frustrated youths

initially claimed that their reason for fighting was to punish the West for its attacks on Muslims. As the discussions progressed, however, it became clear that they had been angry with members of their families, especially their fathers, or had been involved in neighbourhood disputes and squabbles before becoming interested in al-Qaeda.[126]

Other than anger, a sense of identity, or affinity is a motivating factor. Smith recounts the story of Salem, a teenager from Aleppo, who decided to leave the Syrian Free Army (SFA) for Liwa Islamia (AQ sympathiser). She comments, "It was a well-thought-out decision that had nothing to do with [Salem's] religious beliefs." [127] Salem himself states, "When I was fighting with the FSA, if someone was injured, they would leave him behind [...] But the jihadists will never do that. Even if someone is killed, they will get his body back, no matter what." [128] Salem, rather than being a prescriber of Liwa Islamia's jihadi ideology, appears to be attracted to the sense of brotherhood and level of devotion between members. Although "seeking" types do not characterise all members of jihadists groups, Salem's decision reflects how the AQ brand serves a wide range of recruits looking for an outlet for anger, an escape from ordinary life, or a means to achieve status and a sense of identity.

The jihadist brand is also very "cool". Sageman first coined "jihadi cool" to describe the allure of the AQ brand to self-radicalising individuals via the internet.[129] Temple-Raston of *National Public Radio (NPR)* comments, "It used to be that jihadi recruitment videos opened with the call to prayer and readings from the Quran. These days, many of them are decidedly less religious. They look more like something that would appear on MTV." [130] The special report above notes that only five percent of AQ youth recruits classified as "thrill seekers". Experts recognise however, that "while religion may be an initial motivation to sign up, in the fullness of time, it becomes less important." [131] Rather, the motivations to fight can evolve to thrill- or fun-seeking motivations. Stern notes that "professional" jihadists admit that they find jihad "addictive". [132] After asking militants why they were attracted to such groups, Fair reports, "The top three answers were motorcycles, guns, and access to women. You had to go pretty far down the list to get to religious motivation." [133] Sociologist Katz further explains "jihadi cool" as "the paradigmatic appeal of the 'badass' given a jihadi mask." [134] Gangsters highly value their image as a "badass"—which "manifest[s] the transcendent

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superiority of their being, specifically by insisting on the dominance of their will.”[135] Countless pictures across social media depict a “gangster” life of jihadists, with members showing off military bravado, guns in the air, sitting in the backs of trucks and on top of tanks.

The Mexican Sinaloa cartel similarly flaunts a glamorous, gangster life-style. Their organisation is synonymous to an ultra-luxurious life of cars, girls, gold-plated guns, and above all—status. They also display military bravado. For example, Alfredo Guzmán, son of Sinaloa kingpin Joaquín Guzmán (“El Chapo”), posted on his twitter account a picture of his “armed commando”. Alfredo issues a flippant warning for any who are thinking of stepping onto his turf.[136] Relatable, in an article on defecting jihadists, one defector left ISIS when the illusion of “luxury goods and cars” dissolved upon his arrival in Syria.[137] Not all fighters fit the trend, but the bridging of gangster cultural expression and jihadism is a new element of the crime-terror nexus. The trend is enough for scholars and policy makers alike to question the fighters’ motivations—is it jihad, or “G-had”?

Lastly, members also cite very pragmatic reasons for joining. De Bie et al conducted an analysis on the ideological and pragmatic values within jihadi groups. Applying their research specifically to migrants, they aim to assess which values attract individuals more to jihadi networks. They conclude, “Jihadi-Salafism did not seem to be the core instigator of the [migrants’] observed activities.”[138] They conclude that pragmatic “benefits”, or solutions, can be a determining factor in the joining and participation in ideologically extreme groups.[139] Significantly, “One such pragmatic solution can be crime.”[140] Criminal enterprises produce money, and have therefore added a new pragmatic dimension to jihadi networks. The migrants in the study eventually involved themselves in lucrative illicit enterprises such as passport forgery, burglary, and drug dealing.[141] Many jihadist members specifically allude to money as a motivation. One Kenyan al-Shabaab member for example states,

It was all about the money [...] I was jobless. And then when al-Shabaab came with that huge money and they’re giving you that for free, you just have to join them. Most of these youths in Kenya, they’re joining al-Shabaab not because of jihad or Islam, it’s because of that money.[142]

Jihadism in this case represents a straight forward pragmatic solution to the desperate situation of unemployment and poverty.

Another study alludes to the profit motivations of recruiters. The study claims that the recruiters on the border between Syria and Jordan are paid on the “quality” of recruits they can acquire. The “well-connected and well-educated men command higher prices than the more marginalized, poorer, and less educated.” In other words, the recruiters have a smuggling business that has built-in incentives. The study refers to one man who had to choose between the Free Syrian Army or al-Nusra based on where the recruiter could get him. The man recounts, “For these recruiters, it’s just a business [...] They don’t care who you fight for, as long as they get their money.”[143]

These examples suggest jihadi membership is more heterogeneous than commonly understood. It appears that ideology plays a less than paramount role in the radicalisation and on-going participation of individuals. Like gang members, individuals are attracted to Jihadist groups for reasons linked to social group dynamics and subcultural values, or for strictly pragmatic reasons. This at least indicates an existence of motivational convergence in the crime-terror nexus that current threat assessment does not recognise because of their limited focus through an ideological lens.

2.2. Ideology: A Means to Criminal Ends

As already discussed in Chapter One, Islamist terror has quite the criminal record, whilst section 2.1 of this chapter explained ideology’s relatively minor role in group dynamics of Islamist terrorist groups. This last section of this dissertation seeks to clarify the role that ideology plays in significant militant Islamist groups. The global Salafist-jihadist ideology does not represent the end goals of these groups, but rather it is the means to facilitate criminal objectives. Middle Eastern expert Jonathan Schanzer states,

The nexus between jihadists and organised crime is not a new one [...] we’ve seen this among other [AQ] groups like

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[AQIM]. On the Shia Muslim side of the street, Hezbollah is known to be entrenched in the criminal underworld. Welcome to the world of pious crime in the name of religion.[144]

Schanzer proposes that these extremists groups engage in criminal activity to forward their religio-political agenda.[145] He is accurate to an extent. These groups *do* engage in crime and use their religion as justification for engaging in such activity. Yet, Schanzer implies that the primary motivation is still “in the name of religion”. In tandem with orthodox predications, Stepanova also proposes that even when groups conduct an attack for economic gain, it “is not their dominant *raison d’être*.”[146] Essentially, their position holds that criminal activity is a necessary, pragmatic means to further their ideological ends; crime then, is ideologically motivated. Contrarily, this dissertation claims ideology provides the pragmatic means for which to achieve criminal objectives. Engaging in lucrative drug trade, expansive extortion rackets, human smuggling, and kidnapping businesses are *purely* criminal activities, devoid of religious idealism. Islamist terrorist groups exercise “criminal piety”—the violent, devout investment in organised criminal enterprises to protect, empower, and enrich one’s organisation.

Ideology as a Justification

The Salafist-jihadist ideological doctrine has evolved in that it now justifies organised crime. The principle of “jihad”—the inner “struggle” to follow Allah’s path—similarly came to be justified as a physical, “offensive” struggle. [147] “The father of Islamist terrorism” Sayyid Qutb advocated that every Muslim in the ummah had a duty to take up violent jihad.[148] The ideology then evolved to *globalist* Islamist, which introduced the concept of “the far enemy” as the root of Muslim oppression. The globalist jihadist ideology sanctions the killing of civilians, including other Muslims, because they tacitly support infidel governments.[149] As terror has been adapted in Islamist ideological doctrine, so has organised crime.

Hezbollah’s 1980s fatwa was the first known public legitimisation of criminal activity. The fatwa reads, “We are making drugs for Satan—America and the Jews. If we cannot kill them with guns, so we will kill them with drugs.”[150] Additionally, the leader of Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), Abu Bakr Bashir, declared, “You can take their blood; then why not take their property?”[151] A Fatah al-Islam leader claimed, “Stealing money from the infidels, from the usurious banks and the institutions which belong to the infidel regimes and states, is a legal thing which Allah had permitted us to do.”[152] Religious justification apparently also upheld the bin Laden-Taliban global drug trafficking partnership. AQ member Ali Abdul Nazzar commented in an FBI interview (2001) on the contradictions of the jihadist cause:

The emir [bin Laden] controls it [heroin]. He is the world’s largest supplier. Everyone knows this. His laboratories in Afghanistan produce between 4,000 and 5,000 metric tons of heroin a year [...] He gets richer with every drug deal made on every street corner [...] It’s ironic isn’t it? The emir is fuelled by Western decadence.”[153] Bin Laden’s image as a class “A” drug dealer is completely antithetical to the religious status of emir that he received. His decision to cultivate Number Four Heroin—and acquire the necessary expertise and facilities for such a venture—does not demonstrate pious crime “in the name of religion”, but an aggressive entrepreneurial drive.[154]

Meanwhile, he exploited the global jihadist ideology in order to do it. The modern jihadist ideology *is* a means for which to justify these criminal outfits—but not “in the name of religion”; rather, in the spirit of entrepreneurial dominance and enrichment.

Leveraging Image for Power, Status, and Money

There are clear advantages for terrorist gangs to acquire an image associated with status or power. An Islamic religious visage is particularly valuable, because it is more culturally legitimate than the image of criminal groups committing rape, theft, and murder. A religio-political association enhances group access to organised volunteer manpower, money, and other resources by connecting the group to institutionalised power structures such as mosques and madrassas. These institutions have routine access to a vast population of the global ummah, offer systematic means for propaganda dissemination, and a ready pipeline for organised fundraising.

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Islamic extremists also exploit the powerful imagery of brutal violence with great effect. In regions scarred with ethnic factionalism, religious divides, and imposition of radical Islamist groups, a violent extremist reputation acts as a differentiating edge that further teases apart rival rebel groups, swallows up members in the fray, and elevates radical Islamist groups.[155] Walter explains the strategic incentives of adopting an extremist ideology, one of which is the ability to mobilise recruits. Adopting an extremist ideology creates what Walter calls a "market niche".[156] Similarly, Humayun usefully applies the term "cultural entrepreneurs" to Islamist groups to describe the ways in which they continuously "innovate" their ideology to "repurpose subcultural content".[157] Islamic teachings, a fractious civil war society, and the narrative of the Western enemy characterise some cultural facets that various generations of Islamist extremists have sought to repurpose in the religio-political jihadist ideology. According to Humayun, they find "innovative" ways i.e. extreme violence to express this "cultural content". The result is a market niche, in which a population looks to them as a new vanguard that will lead them to a social solution long denied to them.[158]

This chapter first argued that Islamist terrorist groups are very much like gangs in that they are violent subcultural communities that fulfil the needs and desires of its members. The reasons for which individuals join radical groups coincide with gang members' rationale for participating in gangs. Most importantly, pragmatic values were seen in some cases to overtake the value of ideology. Ideology is not the paramount motivation among members. Furthermore, the Salafist-Jihadist ideology appears to be an instrumental apparatus for the legitimisation of criminal enterprises and a credible disguise for the aggressive criminal motivations of power, money, and status.

CHAPTER 3: Isis Case Study

In this chapter, a case study on Islamic State demonstrates the main conclusions of this dissertation. Some journalists and academics have claimed that ISIS *acts* like criminal thugs, yet they liken the organisation to that of a conventional army or even a state because of their formidability and ideological extremity. ISIS is a highly sophisticated third generation criminal gang, and calling them such does not underestimate the threat they pose. ISIS's criminal outfit is seen in their modus operandi, strategy, and the brand of jihadist ideology they evoke. Their ideology neither hinders them from carrying out crime, nor does it represent their true motivations.

The Origins of ISIS

A Salafi-Jihadist organisation, ISIS's antecedents trace back to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's prison incarceration. Together with his mentor Sheikh Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, he managed to garner many supporters within the prison and smuggle out publications which were circulated on the internet. Bin Laden, impressed by the publications, approached al-Zarqawi upon his release in 1999. Despite fundamental strategic differences, bin Laden extended material support in order that al-Zarqawi could establish a training camp in Herat.[159] The emerging leader established his group Jama'at al-Tawhid wa'al-Jihad (JTJ). This organisation grew into a conglomerate of groups across Syria, Iran, Lebanon, and Jordan. In 2004, al-Zarqawi came to an official agreement with bin Laden and JTJ became al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). AQI quickly became known for its brutality against other Muslims and cultivated substantial local dissidence. A drone strike killed al-Zarqawi in 2006 and Abu Ayub al-Masri succeeded in leadership. To placate a wider segment of the Iraqi population, al-Masri merged several groups together and created Islamic State of Iraq (ISI). He also named Abu Umar al-Baghdadi as the leader of ISI. Both leaders having been killed in 2010, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi assumed control of ISI. Tensions continued to grow between AQ and ISI, and in the summer of 2013, al-Baghdadi officially cut ties with its AQ counterpart. Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) was born and since has become the dominant Sunni Salafi-Jihadist group in Syria and Iraq.[160]

Organisational Structure

ISIS maintains a very sophisticated organisation that has harnessed the full capacities of 4GW. Pitt-Walker of the

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International Policy Digest describes ISIS as “a hierarchical organisation with elements of networked and cellular organisations.”[161] They retain sophisticated military prowess that has afforded them territorial gains in parts of Syria and Iraq, including the Syrian cities of Raqqa, Aleppo, Homs, and parts of Southern Damascus, and the cities of Ramadi, Fallujah, and Mosul in Iraq.[162] They also have galvanised support and formal allegiance from a number of organisations such as Ansar al-Sharia (Libya), Boko Haram (West Africa), the Najd Province (Gulf States), the Province of Sinai (Egypt), as well as allegiances in Yemen, the Caucasus, Afghanistan, Nigeria, and Algeria.[163] Simultaneously, ISIS has maintained a grass-roots capacity through effective recruitment campaigns using social media platforms and high-tech media productions. Pursuing a “lasting and expanding” strategy, ISIS is a formidable non-state actor waging 4GW on military, economic, social, and political levels.[164]

The Soufan Group characterises ISIS's beginnings as a loosely organised criminal gang. They comment,

After years of surviving as a persistently violent criminal/terrorist gang able to mount multiple synchronised attacks in built up areas in Iraq but little more, it managed to break into the big time when the collapse of government in northern and eastern Syria allowed it to expand across the border.[165]

ISIS assuredly has expanded in organisational capacity, but this does not mean it has outgrown its criminal outfit. Contrarily, ISIS has evolved into a formidable 3G2 that has only expanded its criminal enterprises to enrich and empower their organisation.

ISIS's Criminal Profile

In an article titled “What ISIS Really Wants”, Wood claims,

Virtually every major decision and law promulgated by the Islamic state adheres to what it calls, in its press and pronouncements, and on its billboards, license plates, stationery, and coins, ‘the prophetic methodology,’ which means following the prophecy and example of Muhammad, in punctilious detail.[166]

Yet, it appears that ISIS is not interested in meticulously adhering to the Prophet's example. The *Financial Action Task Force* reports that the number one source of funding for ISIS is illegal proceeds. They state,

[ISIS] manages a sophisticated extortion racket by robbing, looting, and demanding a portion of the economic resources in areas where it operates, which is similar to how some organised crime groups generate funds.[167]

Shelley refers to ISIS directly as a “diversified criminal operation” engaged in passport fraud, kidnapping, human smuggling, illicit trafficking of cigarettes, oil, arms, and artefacts.[168] He explains that all terrorist organisations, like successful business establishments, need start-up funds, or “seed” money. For example, AQ's seed money derived straight from Osama bin Laden's own pockets. The antecedents of ISIS collected large donations originating from the Gulf States. However, ISIS, the self-proclaimed caliphate, derives its money from extorting the people they claim to govern and smuggling their territory's natural resources.

Dreazen of *The Foreign Policy Group* also directly compares ISIS's modus operandi to “mafia tactics”.[169] He recounts the seizure of tens of millions of dollars stolen by ISIS fighters from a single bank in Mosul in early 2014, which signifies

one of the most alarming aspects of ISIS's rise: the group's growing ability to fund its own operations through bank heists, extortion, kidnappings, and other tactics more commonly associated with the mob than with violent Islamist extremists.[170]

Contrary to claims that criminality has decreased within ISIS's territories, it has in fact, increased. It is estimated that the illegal trade of commodities from Syria to Turkey has tripled for oil and multiplied by fivefold for cell phones.[171] Additionally, ISIS has established a massive institution of slavery and prostitution. An article in *La Repubblica* recounts the story of a young Yazidi woman kidnapped from the town of Sinjar. Written in late summer

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2014, the article estimates that ISIS had by that time kidnapped one thousand Yazidi women, many of which were already converted to Islam, while the others were sold as sex slaves in the markets of Mosul.[172]

The most obvious modus operandi is ISIS's adoption of especially brutal violence. ISIS's brand of violence is similar to the violent tactics of Mexican drug cartels. In fact, Williams argues that the current cartel wars in Mexico qualify as a warzone equally violent to the landscape in the Middle East.[173] Winslow in a *Daily Beast* article notes the Mexican cartels have not only used such tactics as beheadings, immolations, disembowelments, and torture, but since 2005, the cartels have effectively used media communications to transmit their violent tactics into terror.[174] A *United Nations* report claims that in the first eight months of 2014, ISIS killed 8,493 Iraqi civilians, and was responsible for injuring another 15,782.[175] *The Washington Post* reports that between the years of 2006 and 2012, 60,000 Mexicans died as a result of drug cartel-related violence.[176] Despite President Calderon's attempt to foment an effective militaristic counter-narcotics strategy, homicide rates skyrocketed to 27,199 in the year 2011 and corruption reigned the Mexican police force.[177] The employment of extreme violence is evident in both Mexico's cartels and ISIS. Winslow comments that the cartels' ultimate goal was to usurp control of territory. "The videos," he said, "were a statement of pure power." [178] ISIS's carefully directed videos are an explicit means to transmit a message of dominance to not only Western enemies, but as much to their own supporters and rival Islamist groups.

Why Join ISIS?

ISIS has cultivated a brand of jihadist ideology that above all portrays a lifestyle. It is a highly organised and maintained subculture that offers a place for children, previous gang youths, students, women, educated elites, farmers and engineers, and of course, fighters. The media is most concerned with the rising trend of youths' engagement in ISIS's brand of extremism. Youth members, who fit the characteristics of gang members, seek in ISIS a sense of identity, thrilling adventurism, or an outlet for their frustrations. Samra cites *Bab el Tabaneh*, an area of Tripoli, Lebanon as particularly vulnerable to recruitment and radicalisation to ISIS due to its pervading gang culture. He states,

This poor neighbourhood has become an environment of instability, violence, and broken homes, a breeding ground for street gangs of unemployed and drug-addicted youth who get into pointless bloody fights on a daily basis." [179] ISIS is able to offer a social solution to the frustrated and desperate members of these poverty-stricken and oppressed communities. Samra concludes that youth are looking for "salvation". [180]

ISIS, more successfully than any extremist group, has been able to exploit this desire, lending seeming "stability" with their rigid religious codes and systematic bureaucratic apparatus.

Members also participate in ISIS for purely pragmatic motivations. Interviews with Free Syrian Army members reveal that they first left the FSA and a salary of sixty dollars per month, for Jabhat al-Nusra's payments of three hundred dollars per month. Next, they finally joined ISIS, which presumably paid higher than al-Nusra.[181] Another story recounts that a thirteen-year-old boy joined ISIS upon learning that he could make money by "learning how to shoot, behead and crucify his enemies." [182] The Syrian Human Rights Committee (SHRC) claims that ISIS recruits two hundred to three hundred youths per month. The boy in this case was a volunteer, however similar to the case study of Muslim migrants in Europe, these children and young adults mostly sought ISIS for its pragmatic value. The junior training camps provide better shelter and food, overall better conditions than the families of Raqqa can provide their own children.[183]

ISIS appeals to Western foreign fighters for a variety of reasons, many of which do not revolve around a sense of religious affinity to ISIS's radical ideology. In a testimony to the United States Senate armed services committee, Atran states,

what inspires the most lethal terrorists in the world today is not so much the Qur'an or religious teachings as a thrilling cause and call to action that promises glory and esteem in the eyes of friends. Jihad is an egalitarian, equal opportunity employer: fraternal, fast-breaking, glorious, and cool.[184]

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Like many individuals who are vulnerable to joining a violent gang subculture, jihadist potentials are looking for a sense of thrill, elevation in status, and an overall sense of purpose provided by their fellow brothers who are equally devoted to the cause. In the words of Maher of the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR), "Isis are the coolest, most attractive outfit right now to young people." [185] Members boast of their ISIS membership, evoking through twitter accounts, graffiti, and videos their organisation's military bravado, superior brotherhood, and a life of Allah-given luxury. Photos of youths dressed in sleek, black uniforms, and pointing their fingers towards the sky as ISIS's universal gang sign communicates an attractive subculture of "G-had".

Ideology's Role within ISIS: A Façade for Criminal Piety

ISIS is different from other Islamist terrorist organisations in that it has acquired territory. This condition has led journalists, policymakers, and scholars to liken IS to a quasi-functioning nation-state. One article cites ISIS's capacity "to wage war, impose taxes, establish institutions [i.e. financial and educational institutions], claim sovereignty and legitimisation of their own authority". [186] With the emerging concept of 4GW, however, these abilities are no longer the sole province of a state. The essential point of 4GW is that non-state actors, through effective warfare on social, economic, political, and psychological levels are able to pose a formidable threat.

Beyond the façade that the police cars, uniforms, and social services maintain—ISIS's doctrine reveals itself to be founded in the criminal spirit rather than in the name of the Salafist-Jihadist ideology. Khatib states that "although ideology plays an important role in how Islamic State operates, the organisation's strategic objectives are not driven by ideology but instead revolve around the acquisition of money, resources, and power." [187] Unlike AQ, whose ultimate strategic goal is to establish the caliphate, ISIS's procurement of territory instead is a means to an end. That said, territory is not a means to establish the religio-political caliphate as defined in Islamist teachings. Contrarily, the institution of a state facilitates ISIS's objectives of garnering money, power, and reputation.

In fact, the territorial orientation of their strategy is similar to TCOs and DTOs. According to Sullivan, "Criminal insurgents' sole political motive is to gain autonomy and economic control over territory. They do this by hallowing out the state and creating criminal enclaves to manoeuvre." [188] He refers to territory as a means to distinguish between terrorist and criminal groups. Procurement of territory, however, represents the central crux of ISIS's strategy. Furthermore, ISIS's "sole political motive" certainly is not religiously founded, but rather directed by economic motivations and dominance in the region. Their behaviours contradict the religion they proclaim to be motivated by, and rather reflect criminal motivations. As ISIS continues to move through territory, it gains crop and oil assets as well as more opportunities to extort the population it claims to govern. The so-called caliphate represents a self-perpetuating source of money, power, and legitimacy.

A comparison to transnational cartels divulges the criminal nature of ISIS's supposed "governing" apparatus. Sullivan states,

As part of this contest [with state sovereignty], the cartels provide utilitarian social goods, form narratives of power and rebellion and act as 'post-modern social bandits' to gain support and legitimacy within their own organisations and the geographic areas they control. [189]

ISIS portrays the same social and political narrative. As Stern and Berger explain, ISIS "distinguishes itself with a projection of strength and an appeal to populism – the gates are open for anyone who wants to join." [190] Indeed, ISIS represents a modern, yet medieval, social bandit vanguard. ISIS projects itself as an organisation for the people. For instance, the self-proclaimed caliph al-Baghdadi has established a legitimate caliphate for the ummah, who long have been besieged by Western and Muslim infidels alike. ISIS liberates prisons while simultaneously bringing law and order over the six million Syrians it "governs". [191]

A funding report belies ISIS's narrative, and proves their ideological bureaucracy to be nothing but a façade. It states, "[ISIS] has attempted to demonstrate a degree of sophistication and a formalised, structured internal financial management system by providing receipts for levies paid. It frames its activities as "taxation" or "charitable giving", it in fact runs a sophisticated protection racket where involuntary "donations" purchase momentary safety or temporary

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continuity of business.”[192] In conclusion, ISIS's criminal profile could not be more apparent. It has in fact, monopolised crime in the territory they control. Yet, ISIS has been able to exploit the Salafist-jihadist ideology first to gain territory, and now to perpetually legitimise its “purist bureaucracy”. Their criminal outfit only grows, but the media, scholars, and the counter-terrorism community continuously compare them to a quasi-state—which further legitimises their image. Undoubtedly, they are a potent military threat, but effectively countering them as a criminal organisation will be a step towards dismantling their foundations of power in the Middle East.

CONCLUSION

“The terrorist is not pursuing purely egocentric goals — he is not driven by the wish to line his own pocket or satisfy some personal need or grievance. The terrorist is fundamentally an altruist: he believes that he is serving a ‘good’ cause designed to achieve a greater good for a wider constituency — whether real or imagined — which the terrorist and his organisation purport to represent. The criminal, by comparison, serves no cause at all, just his own personal aggrandizement and material satiation.” – Bruce Hoffman[193]

This dissertation attempted to challenge the current convictions in the analysis of the crime-terror nexus and to conclude furthermore that the crime-terror nexus phenomenon extends to the motivations of these groups. The profit-versus-ideology dichotomy has misled scholars and the policymaking community to artificially distinguish between criminal and terrorist groups. This especially has been the case for the analysis of the motivations of today's most prominent Islamist terrorist organisations.

A narrow analytic focus on ideology's role in Islamist terrorist groups has fomented inaccurate conclusions that there are only “possible links” between criminals and Islamist terrorist groups, and that their interactions are limited to short-term, tactical, and opportunistic relationships. In reality, long-term strategic relationships with criminal organisations and the establishment of in-house criminal enterprises shows the rather aggressive entrepreneurial pursuits of Islamist terrorist groups. The current assumptions are long outdated. The criminal records of al Qaeda, al-Shabaab, Hezbollah, the Taliban, and the Islamic State are expansive. These groups exercise a range of working relationships with transnational criminal organisations and drug trafficking organisations including Mara Salvatrucha, Albanian and Italian Mafiosi, and Northern and Western African gangs. In addition to collaboration, Islamist terrorist organisations have fully adapted criminal modus operandi into their jihadist doctrines.

The motivations of jihadist organisations are not ideological, but rather criminal. Social group dynamics and application of gang theory illustrate these extremist organisations as subcultural groups that provide members with needs. Ideology is not the “glue” that unites members together under an Islamist banner. Instead the adhesive lies in a matrix of internal and external influencing factors that are reinforced by group behavioural norms and subcultural value systems. Therefore, Islamist terrorist groups are gangs, albeit highly sophisticated ones.

The role of the Salafist-Jihadist ideology is to disguise the true criminal motivations of power, money, and status, and furthermore to leverage powerful religious institutions. It is a credible and stable façade that legitimises the massive campaigns of violence and enslavement, territorial grabbing, expansive extortion rackets, and unrelenting dominance over licit and illicit markets. Ideology justifies crime, but not for the objective of achieving religio-political ends as defined by Islamist philosophy. Instead, it is a lifestyle exhibiting “criminal piety”.

Understanding the true motivations of extremist groups is essential to counter-terrorism strategy. Undoubtedly governments have reoriented counter-terrorism strategies to better suit the current global jihadist threat environment. These programmes focus on the operational facets of terrorism such as illicit financing and the smuggling of operatives and weapons. After having concluded that the crime-terror nexus includes the shifting motivations of Islamist terrorist groups, the counter-terrorism community needs again to readapt to this reality. In a strategy policy analysis, Fromsom and Simon state, “ISIS's four principal manifestations – as a guerrilla army, Sunni revanchist

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political movement, millenarian Islamist cult and ruthless administrator of territory – do suggest a strategy against it: containment.”[194] Though ISIS undoubtedly is all of those things, they are first and foremost a criminal organisation. The effective dissemination of this fact can contribute to the disruption of current terrorist operations and the prevention of radicalisation. Frustrating the purist image that ISIS and similar extremist organisations seek to promote should be a main crux to counter-terrorism strategy.

On a last note, Hoffman's widely echoed statement was perhaps at one time, an applicable conceptualisation of terrorists and criminals as fundamentally different individuals. The concluding implication of this dissertation, however, is that the future of Islamist terrorism, perhaps terrorism altogether, will find truly ideologically-motivated, altruistic terrorist groups to be rare. Hoffman's famously said distinction when applied to Islamist extremist groups, exists in concept only; it is not the reality anymore.

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[5] See Dishman, Makarenko, Ibanez.

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