
Introduction to the Special Issue

by Jorge M. Lasmar and Rashmi Singh

We are delighted to introduce this special issue on the crime-terror nexus which emerged from the TRAC Forum's third annual conference, titled "The Nexus of Terrorism and Transnational Organised Crime", which was held at PUC Minas over four days in late September 2019. TRAC, or the Collaborative Research Network on Terrorism, Radicalisation and Organised Crime, was co-founded by the authors of this Introduction in 2016 and is based in the Department of International Relations of the Pontifical Catholic University of Minas Gerais (PUC Minas), Brazil. TRAC operates under the umbrella of the Terrorism Research Initiative (TRI), one of the largest research consortia in the field of Terrorism Studies. Our key mission is to function as a bridge between theory, practice and policy formulation by linking researchers working in the area of security, particularly terrorism, radicalisation and organised crime, with practitioners in both public and private sectors. TRAC is comprised of academics and graduate students from universities across Brazil as well as researchers and practitioners from private and public sectors across Latin America. Amongst the many things that we do, we particularly pride ourselves in providing a neutral space to discuss and debate sensitive issues for academic researchers and non-academic professionals across a host of domestic, regional and international agencies.

Our annual conference, the TRAC Forum, has, in the few short years that we have been organizing it, emerged as one of the key conferences in the field of counterterrorism and transnational crime in Latin America. The forum provides an opportunity for practitioners and scholars in the field to establish professional relationships and exchange practical experience. Papers presented at the forum are designed to intertwine theoretical and practical knowledge, thereby offering participants the tools for developing a more critical understanding of the subjects under discussion. On the one hand, this supports decision-makers by providing them with the means to develop more informed responses to key security challenges whilst, on the other hand, also enabling academics to more fully understand the practicalities of intervention. Thus, the annual TRAC Forum seeks to expand and deepen the knowledge base of operators, policymakers, decision-makers as well as academics in the field of domestic, regional and international security. The event usually comprises both closed, by-invitation-only panels as well as open sessions, geared primarily at students. Our closed panels traditionally adhere to the Chatham House rule and are addressed by practitioners who primarily come from Brazilian military, intelligence and police units, although we are also joined by specialists from various other countries in the region and beyond.

The connection(s) and overlap(s) between terrorism and organised crime have increasingly been at the centre of key debates in both academic and policy/practitioner circles. While this convergence is by no means a new or recent phenomenon, contemporary developments have ensured that the threat posed by the terrorism-organised crime nexus is not only more complex but also warrants urgent and adequate responses. To this end, the 2019 TRAC Forum aimed to explore the multifaceted and nuanced connection(s) and overlap(s) between terrorism and organised crime, especially transnational organised crime. The papers presented covered a variety of issues, including, but not limited to: the impact of the terrorism – organised crime convergence on international politics at the international, national and/or sub-national level; the international norms, rules, regulations, decision-making process(es) and laws that impact, and are impacted by, this nexus; in-depth case studies addressing the terrorism-organised crime convergence, including those shedding light on logistics, organisational structure and/or modus operandi of groups involved; the cyber-crime - cyber-terrorism convergence; social media and the terrorism – transnational organised crime nexus; money laundering and terrorism financing; the terrorism – transnational organised crime nexus and human trafficking/modern-day slavery. Because the terrorism - transnational crime convergence is dynamic and rapidly evolving, our contributors adopted different perspectives and disciplinary approaches in order to explore the many nuances and aspects of this evolution. The articles included in this Special Issue are mostly from our open sessions and/or were submitted as a result of our open call for papers. Unfortunately, the challenges of producing a Special

Issue during the pandemic meant that some of our original contributors did not manage to submit their texts in time. Nonetheless, the papers that finally made it to this issue in the form of articles provide an excellent snapshot, not only of the state of the current debate on the topic but also of the rich, nuanced and vigorous discussions we participated in at the TRAC Forum last year.

The first paper, by *Louise I. Shelley* of George Mason University, was the opening lecture at the 2019 TRAC Forum. It did a brilliant job of setting the stage for what would be four days of intense engagement with the subject. In her article, Prof. Shelley presents to the reader the extraordinary range of nuances inherent in the terror-crime nexus while also clearly illustrating how the ever-evolving convergence between terrorism and organised crime represents a grave challenge for the states and agencies involved in combatting the threat posed by this phenomenon. She begins by arguing that terrorist participation in illicit trade serves goals that extend well beyond mere revenue generation, as much of the literature on the subject tends to argue. Instead, terrorists engage in illicit trade for a variety of motives, ranging from the deliberate destruction of history to demoralising communities and weakening their social cohesion. As Louise Shelley demonstrates, the virulence of this dynamic crime-terror nexus is facilitated by the backbone of corruption and technological advances. These points, when raised by Prof. Shelley in her opening lecture at the forum last year, provided the springboard for a series of fruitful conversations on the topic and in a similar vein, this introductory article serves to provide the broad context for the pieces that follow.

Matthew Levitt develops some of these key ideas regarding the crime-terror nexus in his in-depth case study of Hezbollah's international terrorist operational capabilities. Levitt's article here, based on his keynote address at the 2019 TRAC Forum, intricately weaves together data from open sources to provide a richly detailed picture of the connections between, and the cross-border movements and modus operandi of, Hezbollah's various facilitators, operatives and their handlers. In addition to providing critical insights into Hezbollah's operational interests and reach, this text clearly emphasises the international nature of the group's terrorist and criminal activities. More importantly, in highlighting the ways in which criminal and terrorist processes overlap in the group's modus operandi, Levitt underscores some of the central challenges involved in identifying, tracking and prosecuting terrorist suspects who use organised criminal processes to advance their political ends.

Keeping the focus firmly on the Middle East, *Christian Vianna de Azevedo's* article on the Syrian IDP camp *al Hawl* argues that, following IS' loss of territory over the last two years, prisons and refugee camps now more than ever occupy a central role in ISIS' strategy for resurgence in the region. Thus, as ISIS continues to wage a well-planned rural insurgency against the governments in Syria and Iraq, prisons and IDP camps like *al Hawl* can potentially provide it with fighters, facilitators, supporters and, perhaps most importantly, with the next generation for its expansive state-building project. As Azevedo demonstrates, *al Hawl* represents a microcosm of ISIS' campaign of garnering funding, indoctrination, propaganda and radicalization. Moreover, it is also an excellent example of how terrorist groups, like ISIS, can make use of organised criminal processes, means and networks - ranging from the falsification of documents to human trafficking - to not only survive adversity in the short-term but also to further their strategic interests in the medium to long-term. Drawing upon data from the author's time in the field, this article provides key insights into how ISIS' use of human trafficking underpins the sustainability of its political project.

Shifting the focus to Latin America in the next article, *Guilherme Damasceno Fonseca* provides an in-depth case study of a major Brazilian criminal group, the PCC, and its use of terrorist violence as part of its broader tactical toolkit. Fonseca begins by arguing that no single analytical framework seems fully adequate to study the PCC. While he himself is fully focussed on the PCC, this logic can most certainly be extended to any number of organised criminal groups around the world which also defy neat categorisation into any particular framework of analysis. Fonseca then applies an expanded 'third generation gangs' model - with its focus on

politicisation, sophistication and internationalisation – to understand the PCC's use of terrorist violence. Here, most significantly, he modifies the original model by including the element of ideology in his analysis of PCC's politicisation, clearly supporting the point made by several authors in the field who argue that criminal organisations that use symbolic violence as part of their repertoire are perhaps better categorised as 'terrorist'. However, Fonseca is not arguing that the PCC is a terrorist organisation. Instead, he makes a much more subtle argument, suggesting that it is only in particular periods of its long existence that the PCC has used terrorist-like violence to achieve very specific and limited objectives. Thus, Fonseca's article makes a significant contribution to our empirical understanding of the PCC as well as to the frameworks we can apply to study not only this particular group but also other groups which demonstrate similar kinds of overlaps between the use of (quasi-)terrorist violence and their criminal activities/interests/goals.

In many ways Fonseca's piece provides a seamless transition into the last part of our special issue, which addresses the crime-terror nexus through a much more conceptual lens. Here, *David Teiner* begins with a literature review, debating how best to categorise cartel violence in Mexico. Not only does this provide the reader with an eagle's eye view of the state of the art of the literature on Mexican drug cartels but it also underscores some of the key ongoing debates relating to the crime-terror nexus in Mexico and beyond. Teiner, very ably and succinctly, summarises the discussion that exists about how the extreme violence practiced by drug cartels in Mexico should be categorised – i.e. as narco-terrorism or as criminal insurgency - while also highlighting some of the key limitations and problems associated with such a categorisation. Teiner also uses the Mexican case to illustrate another key question in the crime-terror nexus debate, i.e. to what extent do the overlaps between terrorist violence and criminal activity lead to a shift in the nature of such organisations? In other words, do criminal organisations that use terrorist means remain profit-driven and non-political or do they progressively become politicised? The same can be asked of terrorist groups who are increasingly involved in illicit criminal activities – i.e. how far do their primary motivations remain 'terrorist' and how much do these organisations transform into profit-driven entities?

Finally, *Christian de Azevedo* and *Sara Dudley* conceptualise some of the key underpinnings of the crime-terror nexus before forwarding a model that can counter the 'double nexuses' of organised crime, terrorism and corruption on the one hand and rogue regimes, revisionist states and violent extremist organisations on the other. Azevedo and Dudley posit that a dynamic nexus of military, law enforcement and academia is required to counter these fluid and virulent 'bad actor' nexuses with their multiple layers, overlaps and convergences. Coming from two different countries and professional backgrounds, they draw upon their own experiences of serving together in a tour of duty to argue and illustrate the advantages, challenges and rewards of creating a military-law enforcement-academia network to combat the threat posed by what are essentially interacting, bad actor network in the international system.

The articles in this Special Issue contribute some interesting ideas to ongoing discussions about the nature of the crime-terror nexus. They also underscore some elements of the discussion as it exists thus far. For one, it is clear that the crime-terror nexus is multi-faceted phenomenon that presents a key duality. On the one hand, the criminal use of increasingly terrorist means greatly complicates the task of law enforcement and other agencies involved in fighting organised crime. This is not only due to the increase in kinetic violence employed by organised criminal groups. But as Fonseca's and Teiner's articles demonstrate, it is also because elements usually associated with terrorism such as the construction of narratives and ideology, the use of propaganda, violent communication and psychological warfare, the use of the Internet or even the inclusion of religious references in their rituals are becoming increasingly relevant for organised criminal groups as well. As a consequence, these organisations are becoming progressively more diversified in their behaviour and thus even more difficult to counter. On the other hand, as suggested in Levitt's and Azevedo's articles, as terrorist groups become more involved in organised criminal activities and processes, they are also further empowered. The use of criminal means boosts their activities, increases not only their chances of survival but also their scope of operations and provides them access to means that essentially function as force multipliers. However, although

it might seem contradictory at first glance, these processes of convergence also present unique opportunities for intelligence and law enforcement communities as the terrorist's footprint now becomes much more traceable. Furthermore, as terrorism-related legislation continues to, in general, lag behind laws that counter criminal activities in many countries, the terrorist overlap with crime provides agencies with opportunities to prosecute terrorist groups and operators with the help of pre-existing anti-crime legislation. It should be noted, however, that this is a short-term fix and should not be taken to mean that the absence of terrorism-specific legislation is either acceptable or appropriate.

Furthermore, two central concerns from TRAC's research framework are reflected in the current selection of articles. The first is the alignment of theory and practice. The second is the understanding that terrorist actions are influenced by a complex combination of a group's ideology, its operational environment and the different types of rationalities involved. Hence, the articles in this Special Issue are clearly reflective both of the academia-practitioners nexus as well as the importance of reconciling theory with an empirical investigation of the *processes* involved in the crime-terror nexus at a *micro-level*. This Special Issue focuses on understanding and enquiring, both theoretically and empirically, how the crime-terror nexus can become *institutionalised* and following on from that, how this institutionalisation of the nexus impacts on civil society. The articles in this Special Issue thus enhance our understanding about the processes of the crime-terror nexus, thereby ultimately helping us to grasp how ongoing changes in this dynamic can impact specific societies. Developing this discussion is crucial because it allows academics, policy makers as well as intelligence and law enforcement practitioners to not only isolate and detail signatures, indicators and observables, but also to detect how these may change over time and space.

Thus, while Levitt's, Fonseca's, Teiner's and Azevedo's articles deal with specific empirical investigations that may be restricted to a particular case study, the collection of articles presented here can be read as successfully developing a broad analysis of the crime-terror nexus. In short, taken together the articles in this Special Issue have much to say about the study of crime-terror nexus, including: (1) identifying both 'hard' and 'soft' aspects of this convergence which enables us to rethink our understanding of the relationship(s) between organized crime, terrorism and civil society; (2) accounting for the regional variations of this process which helps advance our understanding of the crime-terror nexus in general; (3) developing our understanding of this relationship as a reflexive process, which, in turn, bolsters our knowledge about how specific instances of convergence can impact civil, police and military anti- and counter-terrorism responses, and finally; (4) underscoring the importance of accounting for the close relationship between this nexus and the societies in which they are embedded, which helps us understand how these processes of convergence are consolidated within broader social and security structures.

Another important contribution of this Special Issue is that the empirical investigations presented here confirm that different kinds of rationality co-exist within the crime-terror nexus. Although this is not a new claim, it is important that academics and practitioners account for this co-existence. As the crime-terror convergence is a nested phenomenon, it is imperative to understand the specific social context(s) in which it occurs. Empirically assessing the rationality(/-ies) architecture of all the actors involved in this process can greatly contribute to both the research on, and policies and practices adopted against, the crime-terrorism nexus.

Finally, these articles demonstrate that while there exist clear similarities regarding how the relationship between crime and terrorism develops around the world, changes in context can bring about significant transformations in this nexus. It is vital to account for such nuances. Accounting for such variation feeds into the important understanding that each security context, and concomitantly every criminal/terrorist organizations, has a unique operational architecture. In other words, small variations of context can deeply affect how we conceptualise, understand and implement anti- and counter-terrorism policies and responses.

Thus, perhaps the most valuable contribution of this Special Issue is the fact that it re-confirms that criminal-terrorism convergences are complex, ever-changing and by no means monolithic.

Last but certainly not the least, we would like to conclude by first extending our immense gratitude to Profs. Alex Schmid and James Forest for their patience, advice and assistance in bringing this Special Issue together. Thanks also to Jodi Moore and Christine Boelema Robertus for all their editorial and IT assistance and hard work. We are also deeply grateful to our many reviewers who took time out of their busy schedules to provide several rounds of critical commentary and feedback on these articles. We would like to extend thanks to all our contributing authors for not only participating in the TRAC Forum last year but also for their enthusiasm and consistent hard work under what were, for many, immensely challenging conditions produced by the home office environment enforced by the pandemic. Our sincere appreciation also extends to the IR Department at PUC Minas for the support that its staff consistently provide to both TRAC and the TRAC Forum. Pulling a Special Issue together is a real team effort and we definitely could not have done it without ours!

About the Authors:

Jorge M. Lasmar is a Professor of International Relations at PUC Minas, Brazil, as well as the Dean of Post-Graduate Studies at the Milton Campos Law School. He holds a Ph.D. in International Relations. He is the co-founder and co-director of TRAC and the Regional Coordinator (Brazil) for the Terrorism Research Network (TRI). He also serves as the Director of Legal Affairs of the International Association for Security and Intelligence Studies (INASIS) and is a member of both the International Law Commission of the Brazilian Bar Association and the Committee for the Certification of Professionals acting in the Prevention of Money Laundering and Terrorism Financing (CPLD-FT, IPLD). Professor Lasmar is the author of many books, chapters and articles published in five languages. His research focusses on terrorism, counter-terrorism and the English School of International Relations.

Rashmi Singh is an Associate Professor of International Relations at PUC Minas. She holds a doctorate in International Relations and is the co-founder and co-director of TRAC. She is an Associate Editor of 'Perspectives on Terrorism' and serves on the editorial boards of various other journals. Dr. Singh is an Anniversary Fellow of the Center for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence (CSTPV) of the University of St. Andrews (Scotland, UK). She is an area specialist focusing on terrorism, counter-terrorism and political violence in the Middle East and South Asia.