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Research Article

When Does the Crime-Terror Nexus Fail to Materialize? Drug Trafficking, Militants, and the State in Russia

Mariya Y. Omelicheva[1] and Lawrence P. Markowitz[2]

[1]National Defense University and [2]Rowan University

Abstract

What are the conditions that obstruct the formation of a crime-terror nexus? To answer this question we carry out a quantitative and qualitative analysis of Russia's North Caucasus (2008–2016) where no durable crime-terror nexus materialized despite the presence of conditions conducive to the emergence of linkages between criminals and militants. We demonstrate how the sheer diversity and fluidity of violent actors, with some deeply immersed in the political, economic, and security institutions of the Russian state, fragmented the elements of a crime-terror nexus to such a degree that collaboration among them proved too difficult and costly. Our argument makes several contributions to analyses of the crime-terror nexus. First, our study illuminates the various actors within a purported nexus, demonstrating how cooperation between them may not be forthcoming. Second, our framework demonstrates how a multiplicity of the centers and agents of state power, both formal and informal, is intimately interwoven into the fragmented security landscape. Third, the diversity of the so-called terrorist and militant groups that are competing for power and resources call for rethinking and reconceptualization of what we call a "terrorist group" and the data that we use to study terrorist violence.

Keywords: organized crime, terrorism, crime-terror nexus, Russia, North Caucasus

This article examines the conditions under which a crime-terror nexus fails to emerge and explains what may arise in its place. The lack of a nexus in many "hot spots" around the globe is often overlooked in global security analyses, which tend to emphasize its prevalence rather than its absence (Dishman 2001; Sanderson 2004). Defined as a durable intersection of activities of criminal and terrorist actors resulting in a symbiotic interrelationship and convergence, the crime-terror nexus is considered by many scholars to be a common feature of contemporary global politics (Naylor 2002; Schmid 2004; Williams 2007; Hesterman 2013; Miklaucic and Brewer 2013; Carrapico, Irrera, and Tupman 2016). This convergence of terrorist and criminal milieus has been widely regarded as a destabilizing factor in the global security environment and an enduring security challenge to individual states. In addition, the crime-terror nexus is believed to be both a product and amplifier of state weakness in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia.

Since the end of the Cold War, proponents of the crime-terror nexus implicated terrorist actors in a wide range of illicit economic activities, but focused especially on their involvement in the transnational drug trade. Drug trafficking is believed to be the most lucrative illicit business in the contemporary global economy and the top source of revenue for terrorist organizations. As a prominent feature in the discourse of the crime-terror nexus, drug trafficking also offers a revealing window

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into transnational organized crime. Drug trafficking is often part of a larger portfolio of illicit and legal commercial activities of criminal and terrorist groups and typically appears in spaces where preexisting criminal networks have been defined. In addition, the drug trade often serves as "a kind of plow" by cutting or cementing trafficking routes and informal institutions that can used for smuggling other commodities and humans (Cornell and Jonsson 2014, 3).

By most accounts, Russia's North Caucasus appears to epitomize a "hot spot" where the crime-terror nexus will thrive and where terrorist networks become intertwined with the region's drug trafficking and criminal world (Dishman 2001; Makarenko 2004; Meyers 2017). Consisting of several republics—Krasnodar Krai and the republics of Chechnya, Dagestan, Ingushetia, North Ossetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, and Karachay-Cherkessia—the region possesses many of the underlying conditions that make a location "hospitable" to a criminal-terrorist convergence, including weak state institutions, militancy, pervasive poverty, lawlessness and endemic corruption, porous or contested borders, and geographic proximity to the drug-trafficking routes (Cornell 2012). In the 1990s, Chechen separatist groups with reported ties to global jihadi movements were known for their deep involvement in crime that provided revenue for their violent operations (Hahn 2012). According to the Russian government, drug trafficking has fostered growing terrorist activity and furthered destabilization in other republics of North Caucasus and beyond (Interfax-Russia 2010).

Despite the presence of conditions conducive to the emergence of linkages between organized crime and terrorism, we find no durable and cohesive drug trafficking–terrorism nexus in the North Caucasus during the period of 2008–2016. Utilizing a combination of quantitative, geospatial, and qualitative methods, we demonstrate that the extensive fragmentation of criminal and violent actors in society, along with divided power centers among political elites, undercut the collaboration necessary for a durable crime-terror nexus to emerge. This milieu of decentralized and disparate political, criminal, and violent actors effectively suppressed terrorist groups' ability to form enduring alliances or appropriate drug-trafficking networks. Our findings, therefore, question the universal application of crime-terror analytical frameworks in the literature. While most accounts associate social and political disintegration and weaknesses of the state apparatus with a greater likelihood of a crime-terror nexus, we find that too much fragmentation prevents the kind of collaboration and coordination needed among groups to form a nexus.

Our argument has implications beyond Russia, making several contributions to analyses of the crime-terror nexus generally. First, a study on why a nexus does not materialize constitutes a "negative case" that tests the explanatory power of existing frameworks on the crime-terror nexus (Mahoney and Goertz 2004). As critics of the nexus have noted, theories of convergence and confluence often draw from a handful of spectacular cases (Lewis 2014). Generalizing from a few selected examples, however, tends to exaggerate the prevalence of the nexus and its effect. In fact, empirical analyses have found that relationships linking terrorist and organized criminal groups are often fleeting, typically one-time, ad hoc transactions where the funding of terrorism by way of criminal activities was already established, such as in southern Africa. The arguments advanced in this article explain why terrorism and crime may coexist but not materialize as a nexus.

Second, we counter trends in the literature that discount the importance of the state in the crime-terror nexus or limit it to so-called "weak" or "failed" states. Scholars tend to view failed and failing states as incubators for collaboration between terrorist and criminal actors (Shelly and Picarelli 2005). Extremely weak states exhibiting political instability or governance failures have been named the "perfect breeding ground" for criminal and terrorist convergence (Edwards and Jeffray 2015, 36). In such analyses, it is the absence of state institutions that enables the rise of a crime-terror nexus. Yet, these approaches fail to recognize how so-called "weak" states exercise considerable influence over the societies they govern as the interpenetration of state and criminal networks can manifest different logics of state power (Heathershaw and Schatz 2017). Indeed, the case of Dagestan below demonstrates how such networks have reduced violence and enabled state resilience in the region.

Moreover, "the state" in these fluid environments plays a far more complicated and active role, either in shaping the nexus or preventing its emergence (Hehir 2007; Steward 2011; George 2018). Some presence of the state is needed for a crime-terror nexus to arise: a terrorist organization might take advantage of the lack of governance produced by state failure, but transnational criminal networks require some level of infrastructure and services to operate (Menkhaus 2003). Others have argued that even highly criminalized states can play an integrative role, pulling together networks of criminal and terrorist actors (Omelicheva and Markowitz 2019). In this vein, our analysis below demonstrates how extremely weak, internally divided state institutions inhibit a nexus from emerging when it is merged with a

fragmented set of networks of drug trafficking, organized crime, and militant groups.

Third, our study illuminates the complex webs of violent actors within a purported crime-terror nexus. The crime-terror literature tends to conflate the multiple and diverse types of indigenous militant groups embedded in local political economies and social structures, on one side, and transnational terrorist networks challenging global discourses and practices, on the other (Lewis 2014). The sheer diversity of the so-called terrorist and militant groups that are competing for power and resources call for rethinking and reconceptualization of what we call a "terrorist group" and the data that we use to study terrorist violence. Likewise, the simple dichotomies of religious/nationalist or international/domestic do not accurately characterize the complex sociopolitical milieu filled with a variety of violent entrepreneurs seeking authority in the territory where they operate. Our framework embeds organized criminal and violent activities in local spaces defined by particular social structures, types of economic activity, and power brokers. This nuance enables us to trace out patterns of local violence, discerning when it is used for personal gain (i.e., simple banditry, extortion, and kidnapping) or politically related activities and when it is enveloped in locally driven complex forms of violence for international terrorism.

Fourth, by illuminating the role of a criminalized state, often the unacknowledged third party in the nexus between criminal and political violence, our study offers a set of different policy implications. While the links between organized crime and terrorism remain a matter of serious concern, policies and security assistance aimed at building states' counternarcotics and counterterrorism capacities will be ineffective in the face of the powerful alliances between criminal networks, law enforcement officials, politicians, and politically connected businesses. Even where a crime-terror nexus fails to emerge, the complex ties linking organized and militant actors to members of the government may require intervention strategies that couple security sector assistance with good governance.

The remainder of this article consists of five sections. First, it reviews existing explanations in the literature for reasons why a nexus might fail to materialize. The second section presents the argument, which identifies the mechanisms through which an internally divided state apparatus and fragmented networks of militant and criminal actors combine to inhibit the rise of a crime-terror nexus. The third and fourth sections provide empirical support for the argument: the former's statistical analysis demonstrates the presence of a range of conditions conducive to crime and terrorism across Russia's regions that nevertheless fail to materialize into the nexus, and the latter's case study of Dagestan fleshes out our argument about the lack of a crime-terror nexus. The concluding section applies the study's findings to other parts of the world and discusses its implications for the future study of the crime-terror nexus.

The Crime-Terror Nexus: Obstacles to its Emergence

The crime-terror literature has staked a number of useful conditions and motivations enabling crime-terror intersections. These explanations are premised on an assumption that terrorist and criminal groups are rational actors who forge alliances and engage in criminal and violent behavior when doing so facilitates the accomplishment of their goals. Any terrorist organization needs funds to survive and carry out its deadly operations. The direct costs of mounting a terrorist attack may be relatively low, but maintaining a terrorist network will drain up resources very fast. Terrorist groups have become increasingly versatile and opportunistic in meeting their financing needs (FATF/OECD 2008). When criminal activities promise high yield in revenues at a relatively low cost, terrorist groups can be expected to engage in crime or collaborate with the criminal networks. Illicit drug trafficking offers such a relatively low-risk business with low costs of entering into the drug trade and prospects of high profits. The presence of the drug-trafficking networks may facilitate the movement of drugs from the terrorist group's controlled territory and provide logistical support to the terrorist groups and assistance with laundering the money (Hernández 2013).

What makes these "operational" relationships and alliances between the criminal and terrorist organizations possible is the operational similarities of these groups, especially their control over violence. According to the crime-terror literature, terrorist and criminal organizations use violence and threats of violence in pursuit of their goals, and in order to do so, they operate clandestinely and circumvent the law, they draw from the same pool of recruits, and they adapt to changing environments (Dishman 2001; Makarenko 2004). However, the presence of operational similarities do not suffice to produce the crime-terror nexus. First, ideological differences between terrorist and criminal groups cannot be assumed to be irrelevant in the calculus of these rational actors. Terrorist organizations seek to force political change and run a risk of losing their political credibility if criminal machinations become public knowledge. Criminal groups, on the other hand, seek a status quo

that favors their illegal profit-making activities (Dishman 2001; Sanderson 2004). Terrorist groups entering an illicit market represent a competitor for organized criminal organizations, which already have "in-house" capabilities for pursuing the illicit business and rarely need collaboration with the terrorist groups. Terrorist groups may fear disloyalty of criminal actors who might disclose sensitive information to the government in exchange for rewards (Schmid 2018). The realities of these ideological and practical differences between criminal and terrorist groups make their collaboration unsustainable.

Second, topographical and demographic conditions where criminal and terrorist groups operate can make a nexus less likely to materialize. Criminal and terrorist actors are affected by broadly similar opportunities and constraints, which have to do with the properties of the "space" that these groups seek to exploit and control. Some of these opportunities and constraints have to do with the geographic characteristics of the space. For example, the size of the territory, its topography, and the remoteness of its shared borders with other countries can make it more or less attractive to transnational crime, terrorism, and their intersections (Fearon and Laitin 2003; Asal, Brinton, and Schoon 2015). Other opportunities and constraints are socioeconomic and demographic in nature. The scholarship on the crime-terror nexus has pointed to the potential effects of various demographic characteristics of the population (including its size, density, urban versus rural makeup) (Ehrlich and Liu 2002; LaFree and Duban 2004; Kis-Katos, Liebert, and Schulze 2011; Freytag et al. 2011) in addition to levels of poverty, education, unemployment, and access to transportation networks that facilitate the emergence of the nexus. At the same time, these topographic and demographic patterns can facilitate the proliferation a great variety of illicit transborder activities, ranging from smuggling, human-trafficking, drug-trafficking, counterfeiting, and money-laundering activities to exploiting migrant labor, racketeering, and extortion. Such a fragmented illicit economy, which generates multiple revenue streams, may reduce the economic benefits of a nexus.

Third, the organizational attributes of terrorist groups, themselves, have also been named as contributors to the crime-terror nexus. These attributes include the nature of the terrorist groups' leadership and its structure, size, and membership. When the terrorist groups' leadership is less ideological or in disarray, when the group has a loose-knit decentralized structure, and when it attracts a sizable following of young and less ideological members, it is more likely to engage in criminal activity (Edwards and Calum 2015; Asal, Brinton, and Schoon 2015). Conversely, the absence of common attributes across groups and actors will shape how these groups define their interests, thereby constricting the avenues to establish the ties that can underpin a nexus. Thus, the presence of a range of shifting or competing religious and ethnic identities characterizing the criminal and terrorist milieus can make it difficult to bring the various group into lasting arrangements.

Fourth, the crime-terror literature has suggested that criminal groups' particular ties to the state might explain their interest in forming a nexus with their militant counterparts. In citing a number of examples of longstanding organized criminal groups—the Russian Mafia, the Sicilian Mafia, and the Hong Kong Triads—that have spurned any intersections with terrorist organizations (Gambetta 1993; Shelly and Picarelli 2005; Varese 2011), these studies allude to the emergence of a "symbiotic relationship" and "political-criminal" alliances between the criminal groups and the state that discourage collaboration of criminal groups with terrorist organizations (Dishman 2001; Makarenko 2004). The literature, however, is relatively silent with regards to the specific roles and mechanisms of the state's involvement in the nexus.

Why a Nexus May Not Materialize

We contend that, when a diffuse, fragmented set of networks of drug-trafficking, organized-crime, and militant groups merges with a highly decentralized state apparatus, the sheer diversity of actors (and the interests and beliefs among them) inhibits the emergence of a crime-terror nexus. Instead, an alternative pattern arises, distinguished by highly fragmented and contested power centers connected to criminalized political elites. Far from being an outcome of a deliberate coordination of activities, the nexus is made up of diffuse networks interpenetrating the state, criminal groups, and militants and representing a highly fluid mix of private and public, legal and illegal, economic and political interests and roles in a given polity. While these networks may help to sustain old and generate new patronage systems connected to the state—including local and federal bases of authority that compete for power and access to resources—they do not stem from a centralized state or its local cronies. Instead, they emerge from a context in which state authority is fragmented and contested, arising when a state lacks consolidated control over a portion of its territory's (legal and illegal) economy. Consequently, the interpenetration of the state by militant and illicit commercial groups, including the drug-trafficking organizations, that are themselves fragmented, gives rise to decentralized webs of traffickers, organized criminal actors, militants, and government officials.

In this context, three changes to the nature of state power occur that prevent a crime-terror nexus from materializing. First, political and security officials are overtaken by various organized crime and militant groups, preventing the cohesive exercise of state power and subordinating it to the diverse interests of those within illicit economies. Under these circumstances, organized criminal groups have a stronger incentive to exploit state weakness for maximizing their private benefit rather than engage with terrorist organizations. Second, the central government has only intermittent control over political and security officials at lower levels, further fracturing political power across the state apparatus. While these pockets of autonomy from the central government may provide opportunity for terrorist groups' violent opposition to the state, these weaknesses of a centralized control are more beneficial to drug traffickers and criminals. Subsequently, criminal violence fueled by competition over control of resources and trafficking routes will prevail over terrorist violence. Third, state capacity to exercise repression is sufficient to retain a monopoly of violence and avoid conditions of state failure, but remain ineffective in combatting multiple actors within this complex illicit political economy. As Kleiman (2004) describes, countries with such circumstances, especially those characterized by significant illicit drug markets, enable illicit economies to thrive; they are unable to provide their citizens with basic resources, they are more likely to see their officials corrupted, and their overtaxed and ineffective policing and security capacities are unable to contain black markets in other goods such as weapons or fraudulent documents.

As we show in the subsequent sections of the article, Russia's provinces have many of the geographic and socioeconomic determinants of the crime-terror nexus, and the prevalence of drug trade should make the crime-terror nexus more likely to emerge. However, these conditions are insufficient to account for the levels of terrorist violence in Russia. Our argument holds that a traditional crime-terror nexus may not emerge because the state-crime symbiosis combined with the highly fragmented milieu of political, economic, and societal actors undercut opportunities and incentives for the stable lines of a crime-terror nexus to emerge. Using a case study of the Republic of Dagestan, we demonstrate how criminal and militant actors are characterized by a range of complex, shifting religious ideological perspectives as well as multiple ethnic and subethnic identities, making it difficult to bring these groups into lasting arrangements. Dagestan has also been defined by a fragmented illicit economy, which has offered multiple revenue streams but reduced the economic benefits of a nexus. And, while militants and criminal actors in Dagestan have drawn from similar pools of recruits, neither gained control over the "entrepreneurs of violence" that they occasionally utilized.[1]

The Trafficking-Terrorism Relationship in Russia

To examine the relationship between drug trafficking and terrorism in Russia, we, first, map the locations of terrorist incidents and drug-trafficking activity in Russian provinces during 2008–2016 and, next, examine this relationship statistically using separate models for spatial (time-invariant) and socioeconomic predictors of trafficking and terrorism. We used the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Individual Drug Seizures reports, supplemented with the individual drug-seizures data accessed through the password-protected UNODC's Drugs Monitoring Platform to identify all known individual drug seizures in Russia's provinces.[2] The individual drug seizures' locations were geocoded for cartographic visitations and analysis and aggregated by province and year by different drug categories. The data on terrorist events come from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD), maintained by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) (2018).

Comprehensive and reliable data on illicit drugs do not exist, and all indicators used to measure drug trafficking and related drug problems contain a number of limitations. Drug-seizure reports, for example, do not reflect the exact quantity and quality of drugs trafficked through a territory, not least because some of the drug quantities never get detected. Despite their known limitations, drug seizures remain the most comprehensive available indicator of the drug situation and its evolution. The UNODC, a global leader in data collection and fight against illicit drug trafficking and international crime, has relied on drug-seizures data as a reporting and analytical tool, for several decades (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) 2017). Following the UNODC practice, we take a number of precautions to ensure the practical utility and analytical value of the drug-seizures data that we use in our geospatial and

1 The term "entrepreneurs of violence" is from Volkov (2002).

2 The Drugs Monitoring Platform is a unique global online tool for collecting, monitoring, and sharing a wide range of drug and law enforcement–related data. It is managed by the Paris Pact Programme and the Afghan Opiate Trade Project of the UNODC (https://drugsmonitoring.unodc-roca.org).

statistical analyses. First, we correlate drug-seizure data with other conceptually relevant indicators of the drug situation in Russia. Subnational rates of drug-trafficking offenses, for example, correlate with the drug-trafficking seizures at Pearson's correlation coefficient r = 0.43.[3] Russia's annual drug seizures also trend positively with the opium production in Afghanistan (Pearson's r ranges from 0.23 to 0.31). Second, we "smooth" the drug-seizures data to reduce the distorting effects of any drug seizures that are too high or too low by transforming continuous drug-seizures variables into categorical variables using various approaches. In the first transformation, we use the largest and smallest values in the fiftieth, seventy-fifth, ninety-fifth, and ninety-ninth percentiles to create a 0–6 categorical variable with the new values corresponding to the range of original drug-trafficking values falling under the fiftieth, seventy-fifth, ninety-fifth, and ninety-ninth percentiles. We also create a simple binary variable where we transform each old value below the mean into 1 and each value above the mean into 2. We rerun our statistical analyses on the categorical drug-seizures variables and the results do not change. In the interest of space, we do not report these findings in the article but make both the findings and data available on the project's website.[4] These precautions improve our confidence in the trends of drug seizures and their statistical worth.

We begin with a visual spatial examination of drug seizures and terrorist incidents in Russia. Figure 1 contains a map of the terrorist incidents and heroin seizures in Russia (2008–2016) and shows a considerable overlap between drug trafficking and terrorist activity.[5] Large volumes of heroin were seized along Russia's borders with Central Asia and South Caucasus where the three major opiate-trafficking routes from Afghanistan traverse the Russian Federation. The first, the Balkan route, that is used to supply illicit opiates to Western and Central Europe through Iran and Turkey via South-Eastern Europe feeds drug trafficking to North Caucasus. The Northern route is used for trafficking Afghan drugs through Central Asia to the eastern parts of Russia and further into Europe (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) 2012). The Southern route supplies Afghan opioids through Iran and Azerbaijan to Dagestan. In Russia's North Caucasus region, drugs-related offenses constitute the largest crime category in the total registered crimes. With the exception of Chechnya, the majority of drug-related crimes in North Caucasus involve the possession and distribution of marijuana, rather than heroin. Other regions with significant amounts of drug seizures include Moscow and Moscow oblast, Voronezh, Perm, Novosibirsk, Omsk, Krasnoyarsk, Rostov-on-Don, and Chelyabinsk oblasts. These regions are the communications and transportation hubs with sizable urban populations. Some of these territories have had experiences with terrorism. The map also demonstrates that the volume of drug seizures does not necessarily correspond to the number of terrorist incidents in the region or their lethality. Some of the regions with high volumes of drug trafficking (e.g., Krasnoyarsk, Perm, Sverdlovsk, etc.) have seen no or few terrorist attacks, and those terrorist incidents entailed no human casualties.

Before proceeding to statistical tests, a brief discussion of assumptions concerning spatial links between drug trafficking and terrorism is in order. While we measure drug trafficking and terrorism at subnational level (i.e., using Russia's units of the federation as our units of measurement), this does not imply that these variables *always* operate at this level. Terrorist and drug-trafficking activity may spread across multiple regions. The recruitment, organization and planning, preparatory conduct, and the attack itself may take place in different locations. Multiple acts of terrorist violence in Russia—the Moscow theater hostage crisis (October 22, 2002), the Domodedovo International airport bombing (January 24, 2011), the December 2013 Volgograd bombings, to name but a few—followed this trend. They were planned in the North Caucasus but carried out in other parts of Russia.

Despite this complex spread of terrorist violence in a few prominent cases, research has shown that the defining geography of terrorism typically remains local. The majority of terrorist incidents take place in proximity to terrorists' preparatory locations (Bahgat and Medina 2013), including criminal activity, such as drug trafficking. In the context of Russia, almost 92 percent of terrorist attacks during 2008–2016 took place in the republics of North Caucasus, which remains the epicenter of violence both in terms of the quantity and the magnitude of terrorist attacks. While our data cannot discern possible cross-border illicit activities across the republics of the North Caucasus, our statistical tests exclude transnational terrorist attacks, which constitute only 2 percent

3 The data on Russia's drug-trafficking crimes come from the Statistical Portal of General Procurator of the Russian Federation (http://crimestat.ru).

4 Project's website appears here <>.

5 We produced similar maps of opium and cannabis seizures and terrorism in Russia. Because the visual patterns appear to be similar to those produced in Figure 1, we do not include additional maps in this article.

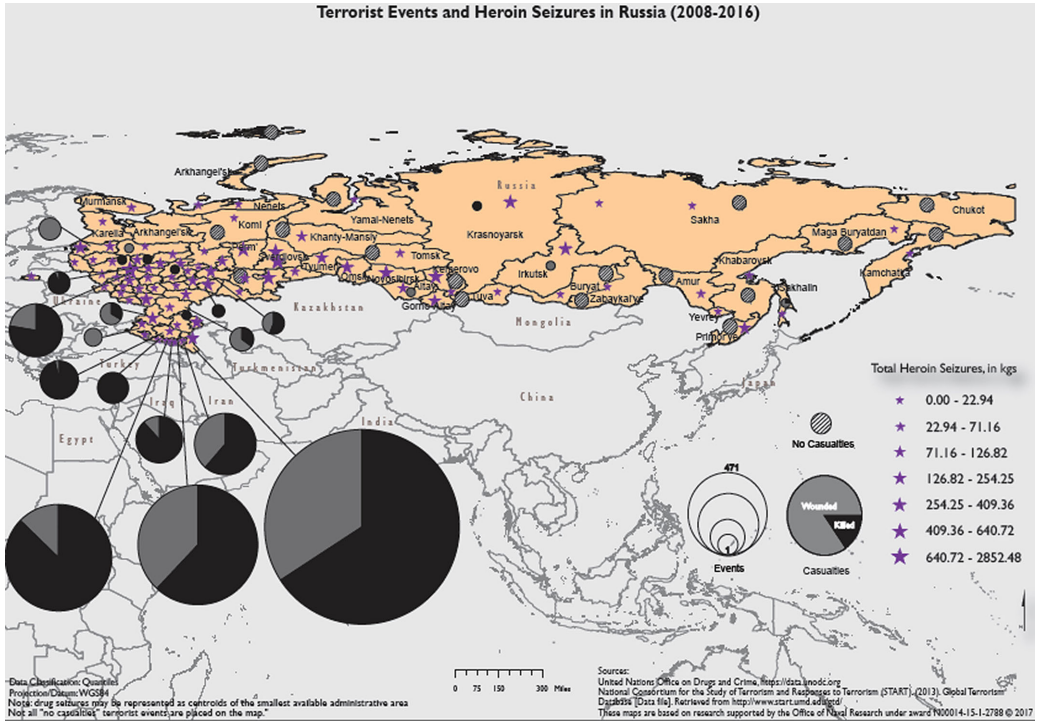

Figure 1. Terrorist events and heroin seizures in Russia (2008–2016)

of the total and involve the movement of perpetrators to other Russia's regions.

Next, we carry out a cross-sectional analysis of drug-trafficking/terrorism associations, controlling for spatial (time-invariant) features of locations of terrorist incidents. This analysis is performed on the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) grid dataset (Tollefsen, Strand, and Buhaug 2012) that we merge with the geocoded terrorist incidents from the GTD dataset. The unit of analysis is a quadratic grid cell, which has a 0.5 × 0.5 decimal degree resolution roughly corresponding to 55 × 44 kilometers (3025 square kilometers) area. We extracted 12,700 cells covering all terrestrial areas corresponding to Russia's territory. For each cell, we create two dummy variables denoting (1) whether a terrorist incident took place during the study's time frame and (2) whether the location was a terrorist "hot spot" on the basis of a Getis-Ord Gi* hot spot analysis (Mitchell 2005).

Our list of predictors include total volume of drugs seized, urban land coverage, distance to the nearest contiguous country, distance to the capital, petroleum deposits, and mountainous area coverage. Consistent with the expectations of the crime-terror literature, we hypothesize that terrorist attacks are more likely to take place in the areas with drug trafficking. We also expect that the total volume of drugs seized will affect the intensity of terrorist attacks (O'Loughlin et al. 2011). Following the civil war literature, which contends that violence tends to concentrate in urban areas (Fearon and Laitin 2003), we expect urban territories to be more likely to experience terrorism. We define two types of strategic locations affecting terrorist strategies: capital cities and petroleum cites. Our expectation is that areas that are located in proximity to capitals and/or containing petroleum deposits will be more likely to experience terrorism. Furthermore, strategic sites, such as border crossings and military installation, can also be found along country's borders. Therefore, we include proximity to country's borders as another control variable. The geographic distribution of mountainous areas has also been expected to influence the course of guerrilla wars.

To measure drug seizures, we calculate a total volume of drugs seized (opium and heroin, and cannabis) in each cell during 2008–2016. We use the percentage of the cell covered by urban area for 2010 (Meiyappan and Jain 2012), the spherical distance in kilometers from the cell centroid to the border of the nearest land-contiguous

Table 1. Drug trafficking/terrorism nexus in Russia (2008–2016): controlling for spatial determinants of terrorism

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Opiates	0.000		0.000	
	(0.000)		(0.000)	
Urban cover	0.774***	0.759***	0.250***	0.202***
	(0.077)	(0.077)	(0.050)	(0.053)
Distance to border	−0.005***	−0.005***	−0.017***	−0.017***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Excluded groups	1.112***	1.112***	2.063***	2.100***
	(0.109)	(0.110)	(0.274)	(0.278)
Mountainous terrain	1.925***	1.953***	1.769**	1.781**
	(0.391)	(0.393)	(0.00)	(0.751)
Petroleum deposits	0.727	0.771	0.000	0.000
	(0.748)	(0.748)	(.)	(.)
Distance to capital	−0.001***	−0.001***	−0.001	−0.001*
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Cannabis		0.000*		0.001*
		(0.000)		(0.000)
Constant	−4.054***	−4.008***	−5.779***	−5.844***
	(0.317)	(0.32)	(0.781)	(0.798)
N	12,700	12,700	12,395	12,395
Aic	502.555	499.165	136.738	135.933
Bic	562.150	588.760	188.713	187.909

Notes: (1) Standard errors in parentheses. (2) Statistical significance levels: $^{*}p < 0.1$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{***}p < 0.01$.

neighboring country (Weidmann, Kuse, and Gleditsch 2010), the spherical distance in kilometers from the cell centroid to the national capital city[6] (Weidmann et al. 2010), and the proportion of mountainous terrain within the cell (Blyth et al. 2002). We create a dummy variable for whether onshore petroleum deposits have been found within the grid cell for any given year (Lujala, Rod, and Thieme 2007). In addition, we include a variable measuring the number of excluded groups (discriminated or powerless) as defined in the GeoEPR/EPR data on the status and location of political-relevant ethnic groups settled in the grid cell for the given year (Vogt et al. 2015).

Because our dependent variable is a binary indicator denoting whether or not a specific cell experienced a terrorist attack or was a "hot spot," we employ a logistical regression model. Table 1 reports the parameter estimates for four models. Model 1 is a logistic regression of the total opioid seizures and terrorism; Model 2 is a logistic regression of the total cannabis seizures and terrorism; Model 3 uses total opioid seizures as a predictor variable and a "hot spot" of terrorism as a dependent variable; and Model 4 regresses the total volume of cannabis seized in a cell on a "hot spot" of terrorism.

The findings suggest that territories with the opium seizures are not more likely to experience terrorist incidents or be hot spots of terrorism compared to those without drug seizures. Only those cells where cannabis was seized were more likely to experience terrorist incidents and be hot spots of terrorism. It is important to note, however, that cannabis is widely grown in Russia, rather than imported. Soviet Union had the largest cannabis cultivation area in the world and was one of the main exporters of the cannabis. Its production was banned in 1987 but not eliminated completely. Today, by expert estimates, wild cannabis grows on more than two million acres across Russia, particularly, in the Far East (RIA Novosti 2011). Parts of North Caucasus have geographic and climatic conditions that are conducive to cannabis cultivation. As it was already mentioned, most of the drug-related crimes in North Caucasus involve criminal offenses with cannabinoids (marijuana, etc.) (Knoppe and Skugarevski 2015). The presence of trafficking in cannabis in the same areas where terrorist incidents take place may be indicative of the same underlying conditions that give rise to both types of activities, rather than a causal association between them. We explore this connection further below.

6 We log distance to border and distance to capital to account for the possible diminishing effect that these geographical features have on the likelihood of terrorist incidents.

All other geographic predictors of terrorism are in the expected direction and significant in most of the models. Urban areas are more likely to experience terrorism, and they are also more likely to be hot spots for terrorist incidents. Distance to border and distance to capital is inversely related to both measures of terrorism. To put it differently, territories that are in proximity to the capital and national borders with land-continuous countries are more likely to experience terrorist incidents. Areas with greater mountain coverage are also more likely to experience terrorist incidents. Finally, areas with a higher number of ethnic groups excluded from political life are also more likely to experience terrorist attacks, suggesting that political exclusion fuels grievances and resultant competition for access to resources that may turn violent.

Next, we conduct a longitudinal analysis of terrorist trends in Russia using its eighty-five subjects of the federation as units of analysis. In the provincial-level tests, we used two measures of terrorism. One, a count of all unambiguous terrorist incidents in a province-year (*terror count*) taps the frequency of terrorist incidents in a province-year. Another one, a total number of casualties (a sum of killed and injured) in all terrorist incidents in a province-year (*terror casualties*) measures the intensity of terrorist violence. To measure drug trafficking, we sum up the volumes of heroin and opium seized in a province-year, in kilograms (*opioids*) and the total volumes of cannabis seized (*cannabis*).

There is a large literature on the determinants of terrorism. For analytical purposes, we classify the commonly used explanations of terrorism into two groups of political determinants and socioeconomic characteristics that can give rise to violent behavior. Political regime type falls into the first category. It has been identified as one of the factors affecting the levels of terrorist activity in a state (Qvortrup and Lijphart 2013; Wilson and Piazza 2013). To measure the levels of electoral democracy in Russia's regions (*democracy*), we use the democracy index developed by Titkov (2016). It is a modified Vanhanen democracy index (Vanhanen 1984 1990) adapted to the post-Soviet context. The index is calculated by the following formula:

$$Democracy = Context \times ((Voice + Exit)/2)$$

where *context* is measured by the effective number of parties (Laakso and Taagepera 1979) denoting the level of political competition during elections; *voice* is the measure of degree of electoral participation; and *exit* is the percentage of votes "against all." The three measures of the index are converted into 1–5 scales and the ratings are used in the formula. We calculate the index using the average scores from the regional parliamentary elections and elections to Russia's Duma. The data on the elections' outcomes was extracted from the Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation (2016).

The contemporary scholarship continues debating the role of economic conditions—poverty, wealth disparity, and economic growth—on terrorism. To control for the possibility of economic influences on terrorist trends in Russia, we chose infant mortality rate, measured by the number of infant deaths per one thousand born alive as a proxy for poverty (*infant mortality*), and *unemployment*, which is an annual average of unemployment rate in the region (a percentage of those unemployed relative to the working age population), as another measure of a territory's economic wellbeing. As an alternative measure of a territory's economic performance, we include a variable that captures access to the internet, *Internet*. More developed areas will have more access to internet bandwidth.

Demographic pressures influence a range of socioeconomic and political processes, including the rates of terrorism and crime. To control for different aspects of demography, we include the logged *population density* (total population divided by the size of the territory); *migration*, a difference between the number of persons who arrived and left the territory of a region during the year (based on the mandatory registration by the agencies of the Ministry of Interior); and s*ex ratio* (the number of women per one thousand men in a subject) in all models. Lastly, we included a measure of education, *education,* which is the total number of university students in a subject-year. Our expectation is that youth that are engaged in academic activities and socialized in the educational settings will be less likely drawn to radical ideology and crime. Russia's subjects with larger number of university students can be expected to have less terrorist activity.

Our dependent variables are count variables, which are overdispersed (the conditional variance exceeds the conditional mean). We opt for negative binomial regression to estimate the parameters of the selected explanatory variables in the analyses of Russia's terrorist trends.

Table 2 contains results from a series of negative binomial regressions. Models 1 and 2 report findings of the regression analyses of the counts of terrorist events regressed on the total volumes of opioids and cannabis seized in a province-year respectively. Models 3 and 4 report coefficients and error terms from the regression analyses with terrorist causalities as an output variable. Model 3 reports findings with the total volume of opioids seized, and Model 4 reports total volume of cannabis seized among repressors.

Table 2. Drug trafficking/terrorism nexus: controlling for socioeconomic and political determinants of terrorist activity

	(1)	*(2)*	*(3)*	*(4)*
Opiates	0.000		−0.001	
	(0.000)		(0.001)	
Democracy	−0.162**	−0.160**	−0.057	0.079
	(0.064)	(0.064)	(0.134)	(0.138)
Population	1.265***	1.279***	0.933***	0.902***
	(0.136)	(0.137)	(0.202)	(0.205)
Sex ratio	−0.014***	−0.014***	0.003	−0.000
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.009)	(0.009)
Migration	−0.005**	−0.005**	0.009	0.010*
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.006)	(0.006)
University students	−0.003***	−0.003***	−0.003	−0.002
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Internet	−0.036***	−0.036***	−0.060***	−0.070***
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.019)	(0.019)
Unemployment	0.023	0.021	0.037	−0.009
	(0.025)	(0.025)	(0.1440	(0.125)
Infant mortality	0.128**	0.136**	0.726***	0.748***
	(0.058)	(0.058)	(0.159)	(0.161)
Cannabis		0.000		−0.001*
		(0.000)		(0.001)
Constant	13.719***	13.380***	−7.331	−2.816
	(4.205)	(4.234)	(11.169)	(10.883)
N	652	653	652	653
Aic	820.612	821.965	938.787	936.177
Bic	869.893	871.263	988.068	985.475

Notes: (1) Standard errors in parentheses. (2) Statistical significance levels: $^{*}p < 0.1$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{***}p < 0.01$.

At the provincial level, the higher volumes of opioid seizures are associated with higher counts of terrorist incidents, but lower number of casualties from terrorist attacks. These associations, however, are statistically insignificant. The total volume of the cannabis seizures does not have a statistically significant impact on the counts of terrorist incidents, but it is negatively related to casualties from terrorist attacks. The latter finding suggests that territories with higher cannabis-trafficking rates (as measured by cannabis seizures) have fewer causalities from terrorist attacks. This relationship, however, is only significant at $p < 0.1$.

We now turn to the interpretation of findings on socioeconomic, demographic, and political variables. Region-years with greater electoral democracy are less likely to experience terrorism (Models 1 and 2, $p < 0.05$), but the level of democracy is an insignificant predictor in Models 3 and 4 with terrorist casualties as an output variable. Densely populated areas are at higher risk of terrorist violence and terrorist attacks with a larger number of casualties ($p < 0.01$ across all models). Region-years with gender imbalance (more men than women) can be expected to have more terrorist attacks ($p < 0.01$), but the impact of sex ratio on terrorist causalities is significant. The higher volumes of in-migration are associated with higher counts of terrorist incidents in a region, holding other factors constant (Models 1 and 2, $p < 0.05$). The relationship between migration and terrorism is insignificant in Model 3 (with cannabis among predictors and terrorist casualties as an output) and significant (at $p < 0.1$) and positive in Model 4. As expected, the number of university students is negatively associated with the counts of terrorist incidents, suggesting that greater educational opportunities for youth may serve as a terrorist deterrent (Models 1 and 2, $p < 0.01$). Access to Internet is a negative predictor of terrorism. As a proxy for economic development, it suggests that more economically developed regions (as measured by the access to the Internet bandwidth) have fewer terrorist incidents ($p < 0.01$). Both *university students* and *Internet* variables are insignificant in Models 3 and 4. *Infant mortality*, a proxy for poverty, is positively associated with both the number of terrorist incidents and their lethality across all models. This tentatively suggests that regions with higher poverty rates

are more likely to experience higher volume of deadly terrorist incidents. *Unemployment* returns coefficients in the expected direction in Models 1, 2, and 3 (higher unemployment is associated with more terrorism), but they do not reach conventional levels of statistical significance.

We can infer from these findings that, while certain socioeconomic, political, demographic, and topographic conditions tend to generate higher scores of terrorist attacks and, in some circumstance, higher levels of terrorist violence (as measured by terrorist casualties), these conditions do not (on their own) enable the emergence of a trafficking-terrorism nexus. We find no support that trafficking in opioids is a predictor of terrorist violence or intensity of terrorist attacks. The findings on the relationship between cannabis seizures and terrorism are inconclusive with geospatial analysis suggesting a positive relationship and negative binomial analysis—a negative relationship ($p < 0.1$) between cannabis trafficking and some measures of terrorism. To better understand why a durable drug trafficking–terrorism nexus has not emerged and about the central role of the state in the complex relationships linking criminal and political networks, we now turn to the case study of Dagestan.

Why a Nexus Has Not Emerged: The Case of Dagestan

The case of Dagestan provides a more fine-grained look into how a highly fragmented political, economic, and societal context interpenetrated with a decentralized state can produce conditions that undercut opportunities and incentives for a traditional crime-terror nexus to emerge. In what follows, we trace out the obstacles that the region's ethnic diversity, diffuse and multifaceted illicit economies, and decentralized and divided political apparatus have placed on the emergence of a drug trafficking–terror nexus. Instead, the loosely integrated web of violent actors—what one interviewee termed an "armed underground"—has arisen in its place. Our analysis draws on twenty in-depth expert interviews in Dagestan conducted in summer 2017 and selected secondary sources on terrorism in the North Caucuses between 2008 and 2016.[7]

There are several reasons for focusing on Dagestan and the recent time period. First, in April 2009 Russia's federal government concluded its decade-long counterterrorism operation in Chechnya and began reducing its security presence in the Chechen Republic. More political and security responsibilities were transferred to the Kadyrov administration. Even if Chechnya saw signs of stabilization, the Islamist and nationalist insurgency has transformed into a more diffuse network of groups engaged in a campaign of violence with the bases in the neighboring republics (Moore 2007; Dannreuther 2010; Kim and Blank 2013). Ingushetia became the center of gravity of terrorist violence in 2007 with Dagestan bearing the brunt of the majority of attacks in the North Caucasus during 2008–2016 (O'Laughlin et al. 2011; Campana and Ratelle 2014). Second, in 2007, the various militant groups of the North Caucasus were integrated into the loosely connected Caucasus Emirate, which was a result of the growing fragmentation of the regional insurgency along ethnic, religious, and ideological lines (Campana and Ratelle 2014). Lastly, by the late 2000s, the Kremlin moved away from a counterterrorism approach, relying more heavily on the use of force. The federal government increased the volume of assistance to the region, began implementing various socioeconomic development programs, and increased its involvement in the local affairs through the frequent reshuffles of the republics' leadership (Omelicheva 2017). These "soft" counterterrorism measures and simplistic bureaucratic solutions have further increased local competition over access to resources and power.

Ethnicities, Economies, and Decentralized State Apparatus

With more than three million inhabitants, Dagestan is the largest republic in the North Caucasus in geographic size and population. It became known to the outside world in 1999, when the Chechen separatist leader Shamil Basayev carried out a raid on Dagestan's border villages allegedly funded by the global jihadi movement (Pokalova 2015). The attackers did not succeed in mobilizing the Dagestanis' support for the establishment of

7 These were individual, semistructured interviews with a wide range of security experts—including government officials, members of civil society, independent security analysts, journalists, and local scholars—selected for their specialized knowledge of these topics. While not used here, an additional eighty expert interviews on similar topics were conducted in Kyrgyzstan (2016), Tajikistan (2017 and 2018), Georgia (in 2017), and Armenia (in 2018) and provide comparative perspective. The twenty interviews—each ranging 60–120 minutes—were conducted, recorded, and transcribed by a small team of experienced ethnographers who combined social science expertise and detailed knowledge of Dagestan and the North Caucasus. In order to preserve the safety of interviewees, members of this research team and those interviewed remain anonymous.

an independent Islamic state (Ware and Kisriev 2001). Although several Dagestani villages adopted sharia and declared their independence from Russia in 1998, the religious and ethnic-based separatist sentiments remained unpopular among the majority of people in the republic (O'Loughlin, Holland, and Witmer 2011).

Dagestan is the most ethnically diverse republic in the North Caucasus with more than three dozen autochthonous national groups and complex kin-based social bases of authority. With an ethnolinguistic fractionalization measure of 0.84, Dagestan is a culturally decentralized region in which no single ethnic group constitutes more than 30 percent of the population (Lazarev 2014). The three largest ethnic groups are Avars (approximately 30 percent), Dargins (approximately 16 percent), and Lezgins (about 12 percent). There are significant religious, cultural, language, and familial differences among the Dagestani groups that do not share strong affinity toward each other. Partly the product of Soviet nationalities policies that resettled many groups in the republic, and partly due to post-Soviet power-sharing agreements that have politicized ethnic identities, there have emerged de facto cultural or national districts within Dagestan that are controlled by one group (i.e., Lezgins or Avars), in which other groups do not operate.[8]

There is also a variety of religious affiliations within Dagestan. While more than 90 percent of the region's population are Sunni Muslims of the Shafii school of Islamic jurisprudence, there are also Shia and Salafi followers, with the latter greatly persecuted by the state. The remaining population is divided among Christians, Caucasian folk religions, and followers of other faiths as well as atheists. Moreover, religion on its own does not appear to be a driver of mobilization in the republic. Just before the rise of violence, a 2006 survey off four hundred Dagestanis found that less than one-quarter of Muslims polled wanted Islam to play a greater role in politics, and only one-fifth agreed that "jihad" meant a struggle against non-Muslims (Gerber and Mendelson 2009; see also Giuliano 2005).

Another peculiarity of the ethnoreligious mosaic of Dagestan has to do with uneven and ethnically oriented (re-)Islamicization of the republic. This process was more intensive in the areas populated by the Avars and Dargins (except Dargin-Kaytag) and much weaker among Lezgins and Laks (Shikhsaidov 1999). The religious split along ethnic lines transpired in 1992 when the Spiritual Board of Dagestan's Muslims was divided into several smaller ethnic boards: the Avar Board, the Kumyk Board, the Lak Board, and the Dargin Qaziete (Shikhsaidov 1999). Although the Spiritual Board of Dagestan's Muslims was reinstated in 1993, attitudes toward Islam and questions intersecting religion have been mixed, shaped in part by the ethnic and subethnic affiliation (Souleimanov 2018). The split on ethnic grounds has been supplemented by other differences between the clergy and the state as well as among various religious groups. For instance, while some religious communities are stringently ideological, others take on religious rhetoric "as a shell" to cover their deeds. Many in the former category were seeking to secede from Russia and create the Caucasus Emirate or an Islamic state akin to ISIS. Among the latter, a variety of motivations and religious practices were used to justify and legitimate criminal activity (such as extortion, racketeering, and violence), while outwardly maintaining a façade of religious adherence.[9] In addition, sociocultural norms, such as honor, community, and retaliation against attack, have mediated any efforts to apply jihadist ideology to insurgent violence in Dagestan (Ratelle and Souleimanov 2017).

The republic has also experienced considerable economic decline and fragmentation in the post-Soviet period. During the 1990s, increasingly isolated from the rest of Russia due to the war in Chechnya, Dagestan's economic development, which depended on agriculture and trade, was severely undercut. This was also the period of massive out-migration of urban population and intrarepublican movement of people from villages to cities. The 1990s also saw the growth of multiple sectors of the informal economy—agriculture, construction, and services—that increasingly operated without any government regulation. The leadership of the republic during that time chose to integrate various "informal" authorities with large followings into formal political institutions. In exchange for rents, the government relied on them to rule the vast region. The informal leaders had their own armed forces. Some of these "rents" entailed the transfer of "strategic" assets of the parts of Dagestan to these criminal-turned-political actors (e.g., the rapidly growing bazaars in Khasavyurt). Or, these informal leaders became heads of the various national movements used for resolving conflicts with the governing administration (e.g., conflicts over land, etc.) (Kazanin 2015).

Moreover, competing political and economic interests were linked to the ethnoreligious heterogeneity of the republic through Dagestan's unique political system. The republic was effectively run by the State Council comprised of the fourteen largest ethnicities. The

8 Interview #20 with Academic and Political Analyst, Makhachkala, August 2017.

9 Interview #16 with local government security analyst, Makhachkala, August 2017.

Council served as a collective leadership institution until 2006 when it was replaced with the post of the president appointed by the Kremlin (Walker 1999–2000; Halbach and Isaeva 2015). Even before the appointment of the first President of Dagestan, Mukhu Aliyev (an ethnic Avar), the Kremlin's efforts at harmonization of regional and federal laws undermined the republic's "consociational" political system (Ware and Kisriev 2001). By 2003, Dagestan's largest Muslim ethnic groups—Avars and Dargins—were on the brink of an interethnic conflict over a power-sharing arrangement within the State Council (Kim and Blank 2013). In response to the increasing violence, the Russian president endorsed Magomedsalam Magomedov, the son of Dagestan's long-time leader Magomedali Magomedov, as the republic's president in 2010. Magomedov (a Dargin) was viewed as a compromise choice capable of arbitrating the competing political and economic interests in the republic but also willing to use its social and political capital to clamp down on insurgency and dissent (O'Loughlin et al. 2011).

One of the consequences of these consociational arrangements has been the penetration of the state apparatus by ethnic and subethnic groups with one clan having "a representative in the structures of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the prosecutor's office, and so on."[10] In the 1990s, these decentralized political arrangements were considered almost "feudal" in nature, giving rise to a system in which the heads of large municipalities and large economic entities performed the role of mafia bosses and bosses of organized criminal communities (Kisriev 2003). Struggling with the legacy of being one of the poorest regions of the Soviet Union and Russia, Dagestan experienced a near collapse of agriculture and sharp decline in industrial production during the transition. Combined with the massive unemployment and polarization of society, the breakdown of law and order in the republic led to a precipitate increase in crime rates, contract killings, abductions of people, various forms of extremism, and violent struggle for spheres of influence and redistribution of property (Shikhsaidov 1999). The multiple local centers of authority embedded in ethnic communities intensified their competition with weak formal institutions of governance that were unable to exercise control over the use of public resources or curb crime, corruption, and violence. In this context, the criminal actors began playing an important role of the "guarantors" of order, supplying advice, protection, and redress to state officials. The armed units loyal to the new political bosses have become to play an extremely important role in guarding commercial and political interests amid the business boom and political transition of the 1990s.

Thus, Dagestan has developed a web of networks of informal combat units led by a prominent figure or a family with support of his community. These networks (some of which were later turned in to "ethnic parties") were used to mobilize military and financial support for their candidates in senior posts in Dagestan.[11] The sources of income for these groups were varied but sizable revenue was extracted from the vast and deep-rooted shadow and criminal economy, including illicit oil production and trade, embezzlement of federal funds, extortion on legal businesses, and smuggling of alcohol, tobacco, and other products in Russia. Drug trade has been one of the many other criminal activities in the portfolios of criminal organizations. Since ethnic groups have had commands of particular territories (or districts), they have been able to exercise control over parts of the drug-trafficking routes and other illicit economic activity.[12] By the late 2000s, two of Russia's twelve child-trafficking rings, and a number of other slave labor arrangements, had been uncovered in Dagestan (McCarthy 2015). The local officials and representatives of the federal governments have plugged into the drug trade, but it has not been the single source of revenue for the local formal and informal elites (including the criminal world). Subsequently, as prevalent as drug trafficking has been in North Caucasus, it has been highly fragmented and carried out by small groups (rather than large criminal networks with transnational ties) (Paoli 2001; Galeotti 2017).

As a result of ethnoreligious and political fragmentation in Dagestan, there was also fragmentation of nonstate violence in the 1990s into a range of disparate activities. As one informant reflected, during this period, "there was an ongoing struggle for power, property, [and] the distribution of property between the same leaders of national movements and between mafia clan structures. And, of course, each of them had their own armed formations. And these armed formations were used by religious groups, and in the 1990s terrorist organizations in Dagestan existed that were basically organized by means of external forces."[13] The state passed a number of laws in the 1990s seeking to reassert control over these groups, but the laws had taken little effect. It was also a challenge given the dearth of institutional resources

10 Interview #3 with academic and political analyst, Makhachkala, August 2017.

11 Interview #13 with regional government official, Makhachkala, August 2017.

12 Interview #12 with academic and security specialist, Makhachkala, August 2017.

13 Ibid.

historically allocated to the problem of extremism, insurgency, and terrorism during the Soviet period.[14] By the 2000s, many local jihadist groups—and local law enforcement authorities—were engaging in organized criminal activity, regularly leveraging threats of jihadist violence to extort revenue from local businesses. In 2010, for instance, a number of jihadist groups threatened attacks on local businesses for engaging in unlawful or haram activity (gambling, nightclubs, liquor sales, etc.), resulting in several jihadist actors as well as local law enforcement to extract from business owners and wealthy individuals a monthly protection fee (Souleimanov 2018, 614–5). Exercised by jihadists and law enforcement alike, these local protection rackets highlight the fluid and fragmented use of violence, with many incidents taking place on criminal grounds and due to the corruption of law enforcement and security forces (Marat 2006).

An "Armed Underground"

Taken together, a host of factors—the diversity of ethnic and subethnic groups, the complex ideological and strategic perspectives characterizing religious actors, the proliferation of violent entrepreneurs, and the infrastructurally weak, decentralized state apparatus in Dagestan—has worked to fragment power across multiple vectors and prevented the emergence of a consolidated crime-terror nexus. In its place, however, a more diffuse, fragmented nexus has emerged, reflecting the deep interpenetration of these forces with the state. This interpenetration began in the early/mid-2000s as state authorities in Dagestan absorbed spheres of influence previously controlled by organized crime and religious groups. On one hand, political elites, security services, and intelligence agencies supplanted organized crime in many areas, engaging in contraband, drug trafficking, racketeering, and extortion and providing physical security for a range of other criminal activities. On the other hand, these economic and political interests permeated state bureaucracy (regional and federal offices in Dagestan). What emerged was what one interviewee described as an "armed underground"— networks of political leaders, state officials, and organized crime actors, permeated by ethnic, religious, and clan ties, that use violence as a resource to support, control, and profit from Dagestan's licit and illicit economy.[15] This composite of intersecting networks is so expansive, decentralized, and diffuse that it is often impossible to determine who is the decision-maker at any given moment.

14 Interview #17 with academic and North Caucasus specialist, Moscow, August 2017.

15 Interview #5 with journalist, Makhachkala, August 2017.

Prominent cases of this interpenetration of the state with insurgency and organized crime include members of the regional legislature who, after fighting in the two wars in Chechnya, had been amnestied and entered politics. Such leaders not only intervened to defend militants who were detained by internal security forces in Dagestan, they also threatened to use them to destabilize the region if the state sought to arrest them.[16] The brothers Magomedovs, reportedly under the protection of Victor Cherkessov, a former KGB official turned Duma's deputy, used Cherkessov's connections to put their relative—Uhman Uhmanov—in charge of the Dagestani regional counternarcotics agency. Uhmanov, in turn, placed "his people" in key positions, in this way setting the Magomedovs's control over drug trafficking over the "Caspian route" and becoming one of the most influential groups in Dagestan. Members of the group were elected to Dagestan's parliament, and one, Alimsultan Alkhamanov, became the mayor of the prominent city of Khasavyurt.[17]

At the local level, many jihadist groups had formed "nonaggression pacts" with local government authorities, enabling both to collaborate in "taxing" local communities in exchange for protection (Souleimanov 2018, 616–17). Another interviewee confirmed that the ethnic-based clans can have links with extremist groups through which they get connected with well-known political leaders.[18] Still another interviewee explained, drug trafficking was often merged with other illegal businesses run by organized crime groups, and these activities were well-known to be connected with political figures and security structures in the regions.[19] And, organized crime sometimes has used extremist groups for its own purposes (suppressing competitors and so on).[20]

The Russian government's effort at economic development of the region, including a significant increase in federal aid, has exacerbated the deep interpenetration of militant and criminal actors with the state and fueled competition over scarce resources. The Kremlin sought to

16 Alkhamanov was killed in 2009 by Interpol's detainee Habib Umakhanov with ties to Magomedovs's brothers. Much information about the drug trafficking and other criminal activities of Magomedovs is based on the analysis of an American journalist, James Lawson. After publishing his findings, Lawson faced threats, and the material was removed from the sites (see Kavkaz-Uzel 2012; Crime Russia 2018).

17 Interview #11 with academic and religion specialist, Makhachkala, August 2017.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 Interviews #1 with academic, #6 with local government official, #7 with journalist, Makhachkala, August 2017.

impose control over the restive North Caucasus by providing lavish financial aid and political backing for handpicked local strongmen capable of maintaining authority (often through the use of a ruthless security apparatus) in the republics. This tactic, however, has enabled Kremlin loyalists to build extensive business empires using embezzled federal aid, local budgets, and revenues from a range of criminal activities. The former mayor of Dagestan's capital, Makhachkala—Said Amirov—is a point in case. Amirov ruled Makhachkala since 1998 and over time established a "state" within a state. He has been implicated in embezzlement of funds (the federal government invested considerable resources to turn Makhachkala into a port and hydrocarbon hub), covering up and participating in illicit businesses, using extortions, and even ties with the militants. He also had many local enemies and was a victim of multiple assassination attempts. He was arrested in 2013 and sentenced to life in 2015 on charges of terrorism, murder, participation in an illegal armed formation and illegal possession of weapons. Many interpreted his sacking and the trial as the Kremlin's disinclination to tolerate the "privatization of the state" any longer.[21] As an example of the latter, drug-trafficking networks, largely from Armenia's Nagorno-Karabakh region via Caspian Sea shipping lines, incorporate an array of organized criminal actors and political elites. Generating large revenues, drug trafficking provides strong financial resources to political elites (and those in law enforcement agencies), shaped largely around ethnic group lines.[22] At the same time, the access to and control over the distribution of official posts responsible for implementing large federal and republican contracts, such as those for the Sochi Olympics, has offered considerably higher payoff than the drug trade. There are analyses that show how a considerable percentage of state funds intended for large-scale infrastructure projects have been embezzled. As a result, these investments not only failed to mitigate the tensions among the disparate networks of violent actors, but even contributed to the appearance of new centers of conflict, as resource-related conflict arises.

Despite its efforts at consolidating the insurgency and gaining support from the global jihadist organizations, the Caucasus Emirate has also remained a fragmented and local project plagued by divisions between the religious and the nationalist factions and between religious and ethnic modes of identification (Campana and Ratelle 2014; Youngman 2016). This local orientation was strengthened with the departure of foreign fighters from North Caucasus and the dwindling foreign support of the insurgency in the region. Despite all efforts at centralizing the terrorist campaign, the organizational structure of the insurgency became increasingly loose, made up of largely autonomous cells competing over formal and informal authority and control over resources in their respective territories. Even if this fragmentation allowed for greater adaptability and resiliency of the terrorist network, the insurgency has become so diffuse that it lost its "identity" and common purpose.

This also explains the tactics and targets of violence. While there have been large-scale terrorist incidents targeting civilians inside and outside the region, the majority of attacks have aimed at the law enforcement and government representatives as well as infrastructure (railway, communications centers, electricity lines, etc.). The targets and strategies of violent actors have trailed changes in the nature of their interactions, reflecting the extent to which militant groups have been entrenched in local and regional criminal and political networks. As Campana and Ratelle (2014) argue, shifts in the formal and informal lines of authority at the local and regional levels heightened competition for resources and triggered an outbidding to control legitimate and criminal activities between various militant groups, on one hand, and state and security agents, on the other hand. The short-term interests of the various actors, often restricted to personal enrichment and acquisition of new resources, rather than ideological motives, have also affected the nature and scale of violence in Dagestan (Saidov 2012).

Since 2013, the Kremlin's efforts at centralization of power led to the erosion of traditional power-sharing arrangements in Dagestan and fueled crime, corruption, and violence.[23] This reassertion of "vertical" power in Dagestan has consolidated the disparate groups and reduced levels of competition among organized crime groups and militants, both in their uses of nonstate violence and within the state apparatus. At a 2017 forum of civil society leaders, there was a general opinion that the greatest threat in the region was no longer extremist violence or terrorist attacks, but the absence of political competition in elections and the absence of a rule of law in the republic. Such a shift was partly attributed to the decline in violence but also to a marked increase in the criminalization of the elite in Russia's national republics (including Dagestan).[24] Another informant reaffirmed this gradual decline in a rule of law as

21 Interview #18 with security analyst, Makhachkala, August 2017.

22 Multiple interviews, Makhachkala, August 2017.

23 Interview #14 with local government official, Makhachkala, August 2017.

24 Interview #15 with local government official, Makhachkala, August 2017.

few people sought recourse with state authorities (and the courts), turning to separate customary and "Sharia courts."[25]

Conclusion

The article has examined the conditions that hinder the rise of a crime-terror nexus even when circumstances are present that promote the proliferation of its constituent elements, such as drug trafficking, nonstate violent actors, and organized criminal groups. It argued that a range of conditions—including multiple and politicized ethnic and subethnic identities, complex and shifting religious ideologies, the rise of varied entrepreneurs of violence, and a weak and internally divided government apparatus—fragmented the elements of a crime-terror nexus to such a degree that coordination among them proved too difficult and costly. Instead, the state, combined with a highly disaggregated set of criminal and violent actors, effectively suppressed the ability of terrorist groups to coalesce with the criminal world.

The article examined this argument through a rigorous examination of the case of Russia. First, it demonstrated the absence of a crime-terror nexus in Russia, using GIS-enabled visualizations of the different spatial patterns of drug trafficking and terrorism across the country and by conducting a series of subnational statistical tests that found no relationship between drug trafficking and incidences of terrorist attacks. Second, it pursued a more fine-grained study of one region in Russia's North Caucasus, Dagestan, to trace out the specific conditions and their complex interface with the state. Evidence from Russia, both across its regions and from expert interviews in Dagestan, support an alternative dynamic, characterized by a complex array of groups, which are connected by diffuse and fractured networks interwoven with and at times indistinguishable from political and state officials.

The case of Dagestan is also representative of a number of regional and global trends that make conclusions derived from the study of this republic applicable to broader North Caucasus as well as a number of other states and regions. First, the factors that are based on generalized notions of weak states, bad governance, socioeconomic challenges, corruption, limited law enforcement capacity, crime, porous borders, and the existence of transnational ethnic networks whose members move freely across national and subnational borders may make some locations "hospitable" to organized crime and terrorism but they are insufficient to produce a durable "crime-terror" nexus. Links between organized crime and terror, for example, remained nebulous in Sub-Saharan Africa during the 2000s, despite the presence of many factors that should have spurred the criminal-terrorist collaboration. Whether in North Caucasus or Sub-Saharan Africa, the reality of interethnic divides, local and clan politics, and a growing disconnect between the local elites and the disempowered population, compounded by the cultural, ideological, political, and operational differences between organized crime and terrorist groups, made collaboration unsustainable (Hübschle 2011). The fragmentation of the social, political, and criminal milieus generated many alternative and informal sources of power and authority that compete among themselves and with the state leadership and bureaucracy. Some of this competition can take on extreme character resulting in diverse and complex forms of antistate violence. In the end, however, this kind of decentralization and fragmentation of criminal and militant networks and their interpenetration with the state apparatus can effectively suppress the ability of terrorist groups to resort to drug trafficking and other types of crime and form alliance with organized criminal actors.

In the future analyses of the crime-terror nexus, it may be more productive and veritable to think about the space where illicit economies and violence coexist as relations of competition rather than cooperation. This is different from a prevailing position in the studies of the crime-terror nexus, which start from the assumption of cooperation made possible by the similarities in the methods and tactics of criminal and terrorist groups. Yet, the mere possibility of cooperation between criminals and insurgents does not necessarily lead to cooperative ventures in practice. There are considerable barriers to criminal-terrorist cooperation that remain largely underexplored in the analyses of crime and terrorism.

25 Interview #15 with local government official, Makhachkala, August 2017.

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