

## ANALYTICAL ESSAY

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# Rethinking Intersections of Crime and Terrorism: Insights from Political Economies of Violence

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The post–Cold War environment has ushered in an era of threats from terrorism, organized crime, and their intersections giving rise to the growing literature on the so-called crime–terror nexus. This article takes stock of this literature, assesses its accomplishments and limitations, and considers ways to deepen it conceptually, theoretically, and empirically. To challenge assumptions informing the crime–terror studies and suggest avenues for future research, the article draws on ideas from the scholarship on political economies of violence. These insights are used to probe the (1) non-state actors that form the crime–terror nexus, (2) conditions under which the nexus is likely to emerge, and (3) varied effects of criminal–terrorist intersections. The article emphasizes the ties of criminal and terrorist groups to local politics, society, and economy, and relationships of competition, rather than cooperation, which often characterize these ties. The conditions under which these groups operate cannot be understood without considering the role of the state in criminal–terrorist constellations. The structure of resource economies influences both the preferences of terrorist groups for crime and the consequences of terrorist–criminal convergence, which are also mediated by state participation in crime.

El entorno de la posguerra fría ha marcado el comienzo de una era de amenazas por parte del terrorismo, el crimen organizado y sus puntos de encuentro, lo que dio lugar al crecimiento de la literatura sobre el llamado “nexo crimen-terror.” Este artículo hace un balance de esta literatura, evalúa sus logros y limitaciones, y considera formas de profundizar en ella a nivel conceptual, teórico y empírico. Con el propósito de cuestionar los supuestos en los que se basan los estudios sobre crimen-terror y sugerir vías de investigación para el futuro, el artículo se apoya en ideas de los estudios sobre las economías políticas de la violencia. Estos conocimientos se utilizan para investigar (1) los actores no estatales que forman el nexo crimen-terror, (2) las condiciones en las que es probable que surja el nexo, y (3) los diversos efectos de los puntos de encuentro entre delincuencia y terrorismo. El artículo hace hincapié en los lazos de los grupos criminales y terroristas con la política, la sociedad y la economía

locales, y en las relaciones de competencia, más que de cooperación, que suelen caracterizar a dichos lazos. Las condiciones en las que operan estos grupos no pueden entenderse sin considerar el papel del Estado en las constelaciones criminales-terroristas. La estructura de las economías de recursos influye tanto en las preferencias de los grupos terroristas por el crimen como en las consecuencias de la convergencia terrorista-criminal, que también están mediadas por la participación del Estado en el crimen.

L'environnement post-guerre froide a conduit à une ère de menaces issues du terrorisme, du crime organisé et de leurs entrecroisements, qui a à son tour donné lieu à une littérature croissante sur ladite « relation entre le terrorisme et le crime ». Cet article fait le bilan de cette littérature, évalue ses réussites et ses limites et envisage des manières de l'approfondir sur le plan conceptuel, théorique et empirique. Il s'appuie sur des idées issues des recherches sur les économies politiques de la violence pour remettre en question les hypothèses éclairant les études portant sur le crime et le terrorisme et suggérer des pistes de futures recherches. Ces renseignements sont utilisés pour examiner (1) les acteurs non étatiques constituant la relation entre le terrorisme et le crime, (2) les conditions dans lesquelles cette relation est susceptible d'apparaître, et (3) les effets variés des entrecroisements entre criminels et terroristes. Cet article met l'accent sur les liens des groupes criminels et terroristes avec la politique, la société et l'économie locales, ainsi que sur les relations de compétition, plutôt que de coopération, qui caractérisent souvent ces liens. Les conditions dans lesquelles ces groupes opèrent ne peuvent pas être comprises sans prendre en considération le rôle de l'État dans les constellations criminalo-terroristes. La structure des économies fondées sur les ressources influence à la fois les préférences des groupes terroristes pour le crime et les conséquences de la convergence entre terroristes et criminels, qui sont également régies par la participation de l'État au crime.

**Keywords:** crime–terror nexus, economies of war, resource conflicts

**Palabras clave:** nexo crimen-terror, economías de guerra, conflictos de recursos

**Mots clés:** relation entre le terrorisme et le crime, économies de guerre, conflits liés aux ressources

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Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, scholars, policy experts, and security officials have devoted increasing attention to the analysis of the so-called crime–terror nexus. Describing a range of linkages and cooperative ventures between terrorist and criminal organizations, the crime–terror nexus has been used as an analytical lens to understand and explain the relationship between organized crime and terrorism. This burgeoning literature presents the convergence of terrorist and criminal milieus as a prevalent feature of the contemporary security landscape that purportedly amplifies the risk of terrorism by consolidating the financial base of terrorist organizations (Naylor 2002; Schmidt 2004; Williams 2007; Hesterman 2013; Miklaucic and Brewer 2013; Carrapico, Irrera, and Tupman 2016).

Although not entirely a new phenomenon, the crime–terror nexus is believed to be a product of changes in the post–Cold War environment. First, there has been a reduction in the traditional revenue streams of terrorist groups, namely, state sponsorship and charitable donations. As a consequence, terrorist organizations

have turned to drug trafficking, smuggling, and a range of other illicit activities to raise funds for their operations. Second, advances in information and communication technologies, developments in commerce and finance, and the ease of cross-border movement have enabled terrorists and criminals alike to exploit the dark side of globalization and forge mutually beneficial relationships along the way. In addition, state weakness in conflict and post-conflict environments in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia have created permissive environments conducive to the emergence of the crime–terror nexus.

Despite its popularization in studies of terrorism and transnational organized crime, the crime–terror nexus concept has become controversial. According to its critics, the crime–terror nexus scholarship conceals immense variation of violent non-state actors tucked under the labels of “terrorism” and “organized crime” (Keen and Moiseienko 2018). The literature does not distinguish, for example, between transnational and local violent groups, and insurgencies controlling territory and terrorist organizations. Most of the crime–terror literature either neglects the existence of lower-level interactions that take place outside organizational settings or accepts these interactions among individuals as evidence of cooperation between terrorist and criminal groups. Critics of the crime–terror nexus have questioned the quality of empirical evidence in support of terrorist–criminal collaboration and charged this scholarship with pervasive confirmation bias (Lewis 2014; Williams 2018). It has also been argued that the crime–terror nexus studies overlook the multiple roles of the state in economies of violence and, as a result, inadequately explain differences in the character of organized crime and intensity of organized violence in different parts of the world (Omelicheva and Markowitz 2019b).

This article takes stock of the proliferating literature on the crime–terror nexus, systematizes its accomplishments as well as shortcomings, and considers ways to deepen it conceptually and theoretically. It seeks to expand research avenues of the crime–terror literature by applying insights from the scholarship on the political economy of violence, a diverse body of literature addressing the relationships between economic issues and interests, and violent conflict. Initially centered on the study of civil war—explaining underlying economic motives, emergent war economies, and the financing of conflict—the political economy of violence literature has expanded to other aspects of intrastate conflict, such as foreign military aid, organized criminal violence, and political violence associated with turbulent regime transitions (Wennmann 2019). Our article draws on this literature in two ways. First, it relates thematically, building on recent work that has begun to integrate the study of organized crime and violence.<sup>1</sup> Second, the political economy of violence has made significant progress in specifying the varied motives, resources, and outcomes in violent conflict. We draw on these insights to gain a better understanding of three areas of inquiry that can inform future studies of the crime–terror nexus: (1) the non-state actors that form the “nexus,” (2) the structural conditions under which a “nexus” emerges, and (3) the outcomes of violence produced by criminal–terrorist intersections. These three areas of inquiry correspond to three sets of critical assumptions about the relationships within the nexus, prerequisites for its emergence, and its consequences for national and global security that have animated research on the intersections of crime and terrorism.

To illustrate the value added in linking the literatures on political economy of violence and crime–terror nexus, the paper extrapolates and applies core insights across these three areas of inquiry. First, it elucidates lines of competition and

<sup>1</sup> Barnes (2017) and Kalyvas (2015), for example, offer broad integrated approaches linking crime and violence. Their studies, however, explore a wider integration that brings *criminal violence* into the political violence literature. While strongly benefiting from this research, our review is more specific, focusing on the intersections of crime and terrorism as defined in the crime–terror nexus literature. Our review suggests ways for integrating a more systematic study of organized crime (Kalyvas 2015) and crime–state relations (Barnes 2017) into the analyses of the crime–terror nexus.

contention between non-state actors that are often missed. Emphasizing the need to unpack the “crime” and “terror” sides of the nexus, the article takes a closer look at the ties of violent groups to local politics, society, and economy. It suggests distinguishing between localized insurgencies and criminal actors driven by a range of motives extending beyond the “ideology versus profit” dichotomy, on one side, and transnational terrorist organizations, on the other. These non-state actors often compete rather than cooperate among themselves and with the state, and competition can result in violence, which is complex, fluid, and multi-faceted. Second, it examines the structural factors—the state and the nature of economic resources—that play a critical role in defining the crime–terror nexus. Specifically, it demonstrates how the state is a key actor mediating the linkages between crime and terrorism in ways that fundamentally shape the conditions in which the nexus emerges. Rather than an empty, ungoverned space, diminished state authority entails shifting, disaggregated power networks at different levels of government, with some of the networks deeply embedded in illicit economies. Additionally, it shows how resource structure defines the patterns of criminalized activities that emerge within the nexus. The structure of resource economies, where formal and informal, legitimate and illicit activities are all intermingled, influences the preferences of terrorist groups for crime. Third, it explores the impact of state participation in crime and the nature of illicit activities on patterns of violence emerging out of criminal–terrorist interactions.

Our review proceeds in the following way. We begin with an overview and critique of the crime–terror literature and offer a reasoning for connecting the crime–terror nexus studies to the broader scholarship on political economies of violence. The rest of the paper is organized in three sections that cover the themes of “actors,” “structural conditions,” and “consequences” of the crime–terror nexus. In each of these sections, we draw on political economy of violence scholarship to evaluate assumptions informing the literature on the crime–terror nexus, posit new questions, and suggest avenues for future research. It then concludes with a review and analysis of the promise of combining these two literatures.

### Crime–Terror Nexus: The State of the Field

The concept of the crime–terror nexus was introduced in the post–Cold War environment to describe the linkages and relationships between criminal and militant actors. In the post–9/11 period, the crime–terror nexus scholars developed a number of typologies to capture the variety of criminal and terrorist intersections. A popular typology distinguishes the *tactical* and *organizational* relationships between criminal and terrorist organizations and allows for the possibility of emergence of the *hybrid* forms of violent actors as a result of convergence of their motives and activities. The more recent perspectives eschew formalized collaboration between criminal and terrorist actors and emphasize, instead, the “overlapping ecosystems” or similar social milieus from which criminals and terrorists draw their recruits.

Initial conceptualizations of the crime–terror nexus centered on increasingly similar *tactics* between criminal and terrorist groups, such as the use of terror by drug trafficking organizations or the efforts by terrorist groups to enter into the drug trade (Hutchinson and O’Malley 2007; Longmire and Longmire 2008; Flanigan 2012; Williams 2012). Inspired by its conceptual predecessor, “narco-terrorism,” this approach focuses on documenting the tactic appropriated by a criminal or terrorist actor and determining the degree to which the borrowed tactic has helped a group to accomplish its goals (Picarelli 2012; Phillips 2018). There has been a proliferation of studies documenting terrorist and insurgent groups’ use of criminal activities—drug trafficking, human trafficking, oil smuggling, smuggling in diamonds, cultural artifacts, and wildlife, extortion rackets, and cybercrime (Shelley 2014; Haenlein,

Maguire, and Somerville 2016; Losson 2017; Ackerman and Jacome 2018; Thachuk 2018).

An alternative *organizational* perspective shifts focus from tactics to the modes of collaboration between terrorist and criminal groups, and how these organizational linkages further progress toward the realization of the groups' goals (Williams 2012). Scholarship on the crime–terror nexus has documented instances of criminal and terrorist groups using each other's expertise, skills, networks, and institutional structures for mutual advantage. There is evidence, for example, of the Peruvian "Shining Path," Colombia's FARC, and the Tamil Tigers of Sri Lanka providing security support for criminal cartels involved in drug production and trafficking in exchange for cash. In the 1990s, the leftist National Liberation Army (ELN) allowed itself to be hired by Colombian cartels to conduct several car bombings. Hezbollah, a political and militant Shi'ite Muslim group, has built sophisticated smuggling schemes involving criminal actors to facilitate its extensive drug trafficking and smuggling activities (Hernández 2013). Al Qaeda has expanded its connection with criminal outfits in a number of European countries as well as drug trafficking in Pakistan and Afghanistan (Felbab-Brown 2017).

The crime–terror studies have also explored the transformation of criminal and terrorist groups and their full convergence. The emergence of *hybrids* has been premised on the assumption that systematic involvement of a terrorist group in criminal activities or a sustained relationship between terrorist and criminal groups will shift the terrorists' ideological agendas to profit-seeking motivations and vice versa among organized criminal actors (Curtis and Karacan 2002, 4; Mincheva and Gurr 2013; Ruggiero 2019). The crime–terror studies cite several examples of this phenomenon. The Abu Sayyaf movement, an extremist separatist Moro Muslim terrorist movement in the Philippines that established links with Al Qaeda and ISIS, originally engaged in kidnapping and drug trafficking to raise revenue. However, the group eventually transformed into a criminal organization where ideology has become secondary to its profit motivations (O'Brien 2012). Experts have similarly depicted the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), which transformed from a jihadist movement into a drug trafficking ring briefly controlling two-thirds of the Central Asian opium routes from Afghanistan (Makarenko 2002; Madi 2004). On the "organized crime" side of the nexus, common criminals have purportedly showed capacity to evolve into "criminal soldiers" as street gangs and drug carters in Central America and beyond have waged a struggle with the state that has been likened to "criminal insurgency" (Sullivan 2012; Sullivan and Bunker 2013).

Recognizing the growing complexity of violent actors as well as the fluidity of their motivations, the crime–terror nexus scholars have sought to develop frameworks capturing the movement of groups between ideological and profit motives, and among different types of intergroup cooperation (Makarenko 2004; Omelicheva and Markowitz 2019b). Tamara Makarenko's analysis is one of the most serious efforts to date providing a conceptualization of different forms of collaboration between terrorism and organized crime. In Makarenko's updated framework, criminal and terrorist actors and their intersections are depicted on two planes with the first plane consisting of the adoption of tactics of the "other" and the second plane accounting for the merging of a criminal and terrorist group. A hybrid entity can simultaneously display ideological and economic motivations (Makarenko and Mesquita 2014). Scholars building on Makarenko's spectrum (Shelley and Picarelli 2005; Hutchinson and O'Malley 2007) explain the movement of groups toward tactical and operational transitions by financial pressures on terrorist groups or political pressures on criminal organizations.

The increasing presence of former criminals in terrorist cells in Europe, the so-called gangster jihadists (Matejka 2017), prompted fresh thinking about operational connections in the crime–terror nexus. A new strand of research incorporated criminal and terrorist groups' recruitment patterns into its analyses,



focusing on these groups' recruitment from the same milieu or "melting pots" and how individuals with a criminal past become radicalized (Basra, Neumann, and Brunner 2016; Nesser, Stenersen, and Oftedel 2016; Kupatadze and Argomaniz 2019; see also Ljubic, van Prooijen, and Weerman 2017). According to this school of thought, terrorist organizations find strategic value in recruiting former criminals. Individuals with criminal backgrounds have qualities that are valuable for terrorist groups, such as experience with violence and clandestine behaviors. Offenders' connections to existing criminal networks can also be useful to terrorist groups for coordinating, financing, and arming terrorist activities.

Despite the considerable advances in understanding the variable intersections of crime and terrorism, many questions remain unanswered by the extant literature. First, who are the actors within the crime–terror nexus and what motivates them? The "crime–terror" nexus concept and related frameworks often conflate terrorist and insurgent groups and tend to view all activities as transnational in nature, overlooking connections of crime and terrorism to local dynamics. Although recent studies have unearthed a complex structure of groups' motives for engaging in crime ranging from simple financial calculus to ideological and strategic purposes (Avdan and Omelicheva 2021; Kenny and Malik 2019; Shelley 2020), the use of criminal tactics by terrorist groups is often assumed to be driven by their revenue-generating considerations. Furthermore, the current crime–terror literature tends to view collaboration of terrorist and criminal groups spurred by organizational similarities in the methods and tactics as a dominant mode of organizational interactions between the two entities. The many inhibitors of the relationships between terrorist and criminal actors have been overlooked resulting in an inflated assessment of how prevalent the criminal–terrorist partnerships are and how easy they are to forge.

Second, the underlying conditions for the emergence of the crime–terror nexus have generally centered around two dominant paradigms focusing on the enabling role of globalization and the permissive role of "ungoverned" and "poorly governed" territories conducive to the emergence of the nexus. These studies investigated the connections between non-state violent actors but often overlooked or obscured the more direct role of the state in the relationship between crime and terrorism. Third, the existing explanations for the crime–terror nexus leave a critical question about the variation in groups' preferences unanswered. Why, for example, some violent groups choose to partake in some types of criminal activities, but not others, if at all? Lastly, the outcomes of the criminal–terrorist convergence remain, arguably, the least developed area of the scholarship on the crime–terror nexus: the impacts of the crime–terror nexus are inferred from the observed levels of violence rather than systematically tested.

Similar to terrorist groups, insurgencies face revenue-raising challenges to fund their armies and guerrilla war efforts. Many insurgent groups have plugged into supply chains of illicit commodities and exploited the markets of lucrative natural resources (Ballentine and Nitzschke 2005; Giustozzi 2007; Felbab-Brown and Forest 2012). Insurgent groups' experiences with formal and informal economies can inform the analyses of the types of violent actors connected in the crime–terror nexus, their motivations, and preferences. War economies create new economic patterns of distribution and redistribution of resources, and alter the roles and identities of the actors. The legacies of war economies outlive the fighting as criminal activities develop a self-serving momentum and become part of the legitimized resource economies and illicit markets in post-conflict settings (Newman and Keller 2007). The demobilized fighters and their leaders may transform themselves into elected politicians, government officials, and businessmen or they may continue exerting extensive unofficial power derived from their control over resources (Mukhopadhyay 2014; Driscoll 2015). The political economy of violence literature, therefore, can be used to explore the dynamics of state–crime inter-

sections and the role of state as a critical variable in the crime–terror nexus. War economies have also been found to affect dynamics of conflict, including the behavior of insurgents toward the civilian population, their choices of targets and tactics, and conflict resolution efforts (Naylor 2002; Pugh and Cooper, with Goodhand 2004; Wennmann 2007; Cockayne and Lupel 2011; Kemp and Shaw 2012; Le Billon 2012). Conclusions from these studies can serve as guides for a systematic exploration of the effect of the terrorist–criminal intersections.

### **Who Is Who in the Nexus: Rethinking the Actors and Relationships within the Nexus of Crime and Terrorism**

The crime–terror nexus concept and related frameworks have been applied to a range of violent non-state actors and their activities tucked under the loosely defined categories of “crime” and “terrorism.” The two categories are often distinguished on the basis of motivation—terrorist groups are motivated by ideological and political aims, while criminal groups pursue profit—but the application of these concepts have been fraught with challenges. Early scholarship on the crime–terror nexus depicted organized crime as mafia-type hierarchical criminal organizations operating outside the formal economy. Conversely, recent studies of the nexus emphasize organized crime’s transnational and networked character, with little consistency in ascertaining its size, membership, structure, or its integration with the legitimate economy (Shelley 1999; Leuprecht et al. 2017). The proliferation of new terms, such as “criminal insurgency” (Sullivan 2012; Sullivan and Bunker 2013) and “commercial insurgency” (Metz 1993), inspired by new forms of gang and cartel activities (and escalating criminal violence), especially in parts of Central America, has further obfuscated how organized criminal actors relate to organized violence (Wolf 2017).<sup>2</sup> Without robust empirical evidence on the operations of organized criminal actors and their links with terrorist groups, in short, the crime–terror literature has been burdened by scattered interpretations of organized crime.

Likewise, efforts to define terrorism have been likened to “conceptual minefield” (Saul 2019) with ongoing debates about the attributes of politically motivated violence in academic and policy worlds. Some governments may use these terms in politically expedient ways, often placing insurgents, opposition figures, independent political parties, and/or civil society activists under the moniker of “terrorist.” Most of terrorist attacks committed globally are domestic in nature, perpetrated by insurgents fighting in civil wars (Stanton 2019). The preponderance of examples of the crime–terror nexus come from Afghanistan, Columbia, Iraq, Kosovo, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Tajikistan, among others, and all those are the offshoots of civil wars. The crime–terror literature has not distinguished between terrorism and insurgencies and placed local and transnational militant groups under the same umbrella of a terrorist organization (Lewis 2014). In light of these challenges, we draw on the economies of violence literature’s observations on non-state actors and their relations within the conflict economies in order to stake out conceptual frameworks that could provide orientation and coherence in the crime–terror studies (Leuprecht et al. 2017).

#### *Conceptualizing the Variety of Actors and Their Motivations*

Having taken a distinct micropolitical turn (Cook and Lounsbury 2017, 2), the study of civil war violence offers several insights that help us better conceptualize the complexity and motivations of non-state actors within the crime–terror nexus.

<sup>2</sup> The often-cited pieces of scholarship on “criminal insurgency” are often informed by law enforcement and journalistic stereotypes and divorced from robust sociological and anthropological analyses of crime (for further critique, see Wolf 2017).

Much of this scholarship has long recognized organized crime as integral to old and new types of violent conflict within states (Wennmann 2019), even if it is still grappling with some of the same conceptual and methodological challenges of studying organized violence (Kalyvas 2015; Barnes 2017). Three observations, in particular, stemming from the studies in economies of violence, can inform the future analyses of the crime–terror nexus: (1) organized violence is a complex and ambiguous process driven by and producing an array of actors and identities that need to be thoroughly explored; (2) violence is typically precipitated by the local antagonisms; subsequently, it is important to probe local (not only transnational) dynamics and cleavages; and (3) labels attached to the actors (i.e., criminal versus religious, ethno-national, or other types of terrorist and insurgent groups) can be misleading as individual and local actors often have shifting and varied motivations that need to be examined rather than assumed (Kalyvas 2003; Berti 2016; Cook and Lounsbury 2017).

First, the study on civil war and illicit economies underscores the sheer complexity of actors on the ground,<sup>3</sup> eluding straightforward classifications into legal versus illegal, political versus profit-motivated, and local versus transnational. Scholars of civil war have eschewed dyadic interpretations (Kalyvas 2003, 475) and have increasingly identified the kaleidoscope of militias, gangs, parties, and other mobilized groups within civil wars (Pearlman and Cunningham 2012). The recent studies of criminal and terrorist intersections in South and Southeast Asia, Latin America, and Eastern Africa began problematizing the simplistic binary representations of non-state actors pointing out that what is deemed illegal by governments and international community may be regarded as legitimate by local populations, and the perpetrators of illegal activities may become power brokers and legitimate political actors in the future (Felbab-Brown 2017). Politicians, government official, security and law enforcement agents, and business entrepreneurs can be active participants of organized crime that straddles the formal and informal sides of political economy. “Organized” and “conventional” criminal activities are often intertwined<sup>4</sup> and various actors may occupy both spheres.

To address the complexity of violent non-state actors embroiled in conflict, the studies of political economies of violence saw a shift from country- or conflict-level characteristics of violence to the actor-level characteristics, behaviors, and interdependencies. The various attributes of non-state actors have been found to affect conflict dynamics. In particular, their capacity, resources, or strength have been systematically linked to the onset, duration, and severity of organized violence. Therefore, it has been recommended to categorize violent non-state actors based on their relative capacity (the size, cohesion, and leadership), relationship with the state, and level of institutionalization (Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan 2009; Bakke, Cunningham, and Seymour 2012; Cook and Lounsbury 2017), and consider the social, political, and economic dimensions of their activities (Berti 2016). In sum, studies of the crime–terror nexus, as a field, may benefit from disaggregating the actors involved and conceptualizing them along analytical dimensions that go beyond macro-cleavages and dyadic labels.

Second, contrary to depictions of crime–terror nexus as largely a transnational phenomenon, the literature on the political economy of violence demonstrates that violent and criminal actors are distinctly local–national in scope and character, even though they may benefit from external funding, training, and manpower. As numerous detailed country studies of civil conflicts in the post–Cold War era have shown, they emerge out of the local conflict dynamics, ethnic and subethnic

<sup>3</sup> In the early stage of Syria’s civil war, for example, the opposition to Bashar Al-Assad regime was made up of more than 1,000 armed groups with competing agendas and goals (Richani 2016, 50).

<sup>4</sup> For example, the use of sexual violence by insurgent groups often takes place in conjunction with human trafficking of their victims (Kenny and Malik 2019).



cleavages, negotiations of power between the center and periphery, and local social milieus. They are sustained by the existing social and commercial networks and informal arrangements rooted in the long-standing social structures and local political economies (licit and illicit). And they seek to extend influence over the areas where they operate, even if they may opportunistically exploit transnational illicit flows or tenuous affiliations with international causes. As surveys of civil wars in Africa have shown how varieties of rebels, insurgents, and warlords abound (as do their causes), but decades of conflict have remained surprisingly local and national (Reno 1995; Williams 2012).

Similarly, local organized criminal groups and insurgencies that are often examined within crime–terror analyses are distinct from transnational criminal networks and the “core” leadership of transnational terrorist groups. The latter are more loosely connected to the location, whose vulnerabilities they exploit for conducting their operations in pursuit of the broader ideological and political objectives (Hutchinson and O’Malley 2007; Lewis 2014). Africa offers a stark example of challenges of untangling the local militant and criminal groups and transnational terrorist movements. Different parts of the continent are home to a variety of local militant and criminal organizations employing contrasting strategies and ideologies, some forming tactical alliances with international terrorist movements, while ultimately concerned with their standing in local political and economic milieus. Transnational and regional terrorist groups, such as Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, Boko Haram, and Al-Shabaab, have taken advantage of regional dynamics to plug in and benefit from pervasive criminal activities, while seeking to concurrently expand their political influence and military and financial power in the region (Reitano, Clarke, and Adal 2017). And, although the local militant actors may espouse the ideology of the transnational terrorist organizations, it is the local issues—poor governance, competition over the local resources and authority, tribal divisions and alike—that empower and energize these local criminal and militant actors.

Recognizing these important differences between violent actors encourages researchers to rethink how they deploy the notion of a “terrorist group,” possibly saving this designation for transnational terrorist organizations. This is not to say that local insurgents eschew terrorist tactics, namely the threat or the use of violence for attaining a political or ideological objective through intimidation or incitement of fear in a larger audience beyond the immediate victims (Hofman 2006, 3). Localized insurgencies use violence to impose or reinforce their control of a particular space, including when their dominance is threatened by the central authorities. Since the social bases of crime are also embedded in local contexts (although they can span state boundaries and subnational divisions based on tribal, language, and kin ties), it can be expected that the primary relationship of organized criminal groupings will be with the local insurgencies, rather than transnational terrorist organizations. Much like economies of violence literature, future research into the criminal–terrorist intersections should include special focus on the origins and beneficiaries of illicit or shadow economies and informal financial systems. This will include the assessment of the roles that the beneficiaries of illicit economies play in facilitating the emergence of linkages between crime and terrorism, particularly in relation to terrorist financing.

Third, the insights into the insurgents’ motivations that emerge from the analyses of micropolitical dynamics of civil wars may also assist in developing a more nuanced understanding of the motives of violent non-state actors. The scholarship on political economies of violent conflict has demonstrated a range of motives driving insurgents’ behavior. While some insurgents can engage in crime in pursuit of finding, they can also use predatory economic activities as a means of war, governance, recruitment, and other strategies (Freeman 2011). Boko Haram, for example, selected its targets for robbing based on both economic and strategic ob-

jectives. This theme of combining violence with strategic looting has been an important one in the group's criminal and terrorist history (Mahmood 2018). Human trafficking, too, has been used to intimidate and subjugate the enemy and strengthen the violent group's cohesiveness and identity (Malik 2017). By offering prospective and current members human slaves who can be used for domestic servitude and sexual exploitation, human trafficking has been deployed as an expedient strategy for recruiting, retaining, and rewarding combatants (Stone and Pattillo 2011). In Afghanistan and Colombia, insurgent groups have used the proceeds from their criminal activity to provide the scarce public goods to the marginalized and impoverished populations. The resulting "crimilegal governance arrangements," which encompass both non-state and state actors, serve not only economic interest but also particularistic concerns with attaining or preserving the de facto authority, stability, and physical security of those involved (Schultze-Kraft 2018).

Furthermore, both terrorism and crime can be conceived of as an individual- and group-level activity and the individual motivations for crime and violence can be different from those of groups. For instance, some combatants can exploit institutional weakness, power vacuum, and economic opportunities for their personal enrichment, while others may be coerced into illicit economic activities or compelled to be part of war economies out of the need for survival. What is deemed criminal can be a source of jobs and livelihoods for communities, and rebel groups may engage in and protect the illicit economy to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the population. Similarly, the phenomenon of the former criminals-turned-jihadists in Europe cannot be understood by limiting the analysis to ideological or economic motivations. The street-competent individuals with criminal histories join jihad based on the interplay of ideas, friendship dynamics, identities, and advantages bestowed by street culture in conjunction with socioeconomic and ideological concerns (Ljujic, van Prooijen, and Weerman 2017; D'Amato 2019; Kupertadze and Argomaniz 2019). These analyses of criminals-turned-jihadists have focused on the presence of a complex and dynamic social milieu involving extremists and non-extremists. Future research can seek to understand whether and how the presence of these "hybrid" networks dismantles the status of a terrorist organization as an ideologically pure group. This is particularly relevant to ISIS, which calculated exploitation of Salafist-Jihadist ideology in the recruitment of criminals has diluted its ideological purity. Since criminals-turned-jihadists are less ideological, the change in the membership of a terrorist group may lead to changes in its nature.

#### *Understanding Actors' Collaboration and Competition*

The studies of the crime-terror nexus are prone to view intersections of criminal and terrorist actors as examples of collaboration in pursuit of the groups' political and economic objectives.<sup>5</sup> Much of the scholarship starts from the assumption that similarities in the methods and tactics of criminal and terrorist groups, their clandestine nature, antagonism toward the state, and opportunism in meeting their financial or criminal needs turn terrorist and criminal actors into the willing collaborators (Hernández 2013; Clarke 2015; Thachuk 2018). Yet, the mere possibility of cooperation between criminals and terrorists does not necessarily lead to cooperative ventures in practice. There are considerable barriers to criminal-terrorist cooperation.

The sheer diversity and number of groups competing for resources and recruits can make criminal-terrorist linkages a challenge. Sometimes, the relationship that is portrayed as cooperative involves coercion rather than a voluntary alliance forged in pursuit of shared objectives. It has been argued, for example, that the relation-

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<sup>5</sup>The recent studies in the crime-terror nexus recognize that criminal-terrorist collaborations differ in terms of their quality, type, and duration (Perlinger and Palmieri 2019).

ship between Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and Columbian drug traffickers represents a form of “cash-for-protection” cooperation, while it is equally plausible that Salafi-jihadist militant groups extorted money from the South American cocaine traffickers or taxed their passage across North Africa by forcing them into the partnership (Ekici, Akbulut, and Williams 2011). At other times, interactions among the criminal and terrorist rank-and-file drawn from the same pool of recruits are mistaken to be full-fledged cooperation between criminal and terrorist organizations. As a result, the prevalence of criminal–terrorist partnerships has become exaggerated while the inhibitors of their cooperation as well as the drivers of competition have been downplayed.

The literature on the political economy of violent conflict, on the other hand, starts from the assumption that organized violence is primarily a political competition for legitimacy, authority, and resources. At the heart of the competition among terrorists, criminals, and insurgents among themselves and with the state lie the questions of legitimacy, sovereignty, territorial control, and monopoly on violence. It is the competition among “wielders of coercion” for control over capital and territory that has been put forth as a genesis of the modern state (Tilly 1985) and a potent source of its unraveling due to the decentralization and privatization of coercion and capital (Leander 2004; Dammert and Sarmiento 2019). The engagement of the crime–terror literature with these concepts offers productive research avenues and promises greater theoretical richness to the crime–terror scholarship.

Similar to the Sicilian mafia that developed into a state-wide industry specializing in the provision of private protection in the wake of World War II (Gambetta 1993), violent actors that propped up in the post-Soviet territories in the wake of the Soviet Union’s dissolution provided protection (a “roof” or *krysha*) to nascent businesses and helped to settle familial and business scores filling the niche left by weak formal institutions and unregulated political economies (Volkov 2002; Berdikieva 2009). Elsewhere in West Africa and parts of East Asia, a diverse set of actors—militants, criminals, and local strongmen who provide “security” in territory they control—have competed, often violently, for authority and revenue (Leander 2004). Whether in conflict zones or in the areas of “peace” plagued by poverty, discrimination, and disempowerment, violent actors often compete among themselves and with the state. It has even been argued that crime in these contexts should not be viewed “solely as aberrant social activity to be suppressed” but “as a competition in state-making” (Felbab-Brown 2010a).

Studies of civil war, moreover, have employed a number of microlevel mechanisms to better understand the drivers of competition and conflict within and between groups. Conceptualizing collaboration among actors as a collective action problem, for instance, is a strategy some scholars have used to explain why non-state actors confront recruitment and retention problems, such as ethnic defection and free riding (Kalyvas and Kocher 2007). Others have used outbidding among groups to account for increasing levels of violence within civil war—a concept that has been adopted by some to explain how outbidding can push groups that compete for support from the same constituencies (Bloom 2005; Chenoweth 2010; Conrad and Greene 2015), and violent actors compete among themselves and with criminal actors in drawing recruits from the same “overlapping ecosystems” (Kupatadze and Argomaniz 2019).

Alternatively, considerations of legitimacy, not only opportunity structure, enter into the decision-making calculus regarding involvement in crime and violence (Asal, Rethemeyer, and Schoon 2019). The scholarship on the political economy of violence has demonstrated that the crime–insurgency nexus can result in the distribution of real-time economic benefits, protection, and regulation services to population to foster the insurgent groups’ legitimacy (Flanigan 2008; Grynkewich 2008; Cammett 2014; Arjona 2016). With large financial profits from the illicit economy, insurgents can supply a variety of social services otherwise unavailable

to people. These include educational, health, transportation, and sewer services (Felbab-Brown 2010b).

If the pursuit of legitimacy shapes insurgents' behavior, how does their participation in crime reflect on their legitimacy, political capital, bargaining position vis-à-vis local and national authorities, and the nature and durability of conflict resolution mechanisms and outcomes? The relationship between the different types of criminal activities deployed by terrorist groups that control territory (or insurgent groups that resort to terrorist tactics) and their ability to recruit new members, conduct operations, and withstand the government offensive is an area of knowledge that is ripe for investigation. It has been shown, for example, that insurgent groups, which offer social service to local population, are considerably less likely to participate in crimes that involve violence against local population, such as kidnappings for ransom and robberies (Asal, Rethemeyer, and Schoon 2019). Subsequently, violent groups, which seek to create alternative systems of governance in competition with the state, can be expected to have a different assessment of social costs that come with their involvement in crime.

Future research, then, might seek to clarify not only the type of violence that such competition is likely to produce, but also the role that illicit economies play in the competition. It may be productive to think about the intersections of crime and terrorism as relations of competition rather than cooperation, or construe the crime–terror nexus along the competition–cooperation continuum. Violent actors entering illicit economy are competitors for organized criminal organizations, which already have “in-house” capabilities for pursuing the illicit business and rarely need collaboration with the insurgent groups. The latter, on the other hand, may fear the consequences of state collusion in crime and a possibility that their criminal partners may disclose sensitive information to the government in exchange for rewards (Schmidt 2018).

### **Structural Factors Enabling and Shaping the Crime–Terror Nexus**

Many analyses of the crime–terror nexus root their accounts in two broad underlying conditions that enable the plethora of non-state actors to operate without constraint. First, it has been argued that globalization has facilitated the convergence of crime and violence by means of fast communication, travel, and technologies (Sullivan and Bunker 2013). Second, “ungoverned” territories have provided a permissive environment for functioning and interfusion of criminal and terrorist actors (Ellis 1999; King 2001; Viano 2020). Weak and post-conflict states in Africa, Latin America, and South East Asia exhibiting political instability or governance failures have been dubbed the “perfect breeding ground” for criminal and terrorist convergence (Shelley and Picarelli 2005; Edwards and Jeffrey 2015, 36). These depictions, however, obfuscate the complex processes and institutions through which the effects of globalization can be reduced or amplified, and how state “strength” and “fragility” can come in a variety of economic, political, and social formats. Drawing on various streams within the political economy of violence literature, we derive insights on the mediating role of the state as well as the constraining effects of resource structure on the likelihood and nature of the nexus.

#### *The Mediating Role of the State*

Conflict studies and the scholarship on the political economy of violence have shown that cross-border criminality and political violence are not necessarily the outcome of a state weakness or failure (Patrick 2011). Violence and crime can be deliberate actions by the governments seeking to capture control over illicit economy and the rents that it generates. Conversely, the existence of pervasive illicit economy will not always pose a threat to stability of the government, despite its detrimental

consequences for economic development and political processes (Staniland 2014). In West Africa, for example, the appearance of the cocaine trafficking awarded considerable political and financial benefits to some governments and political elites backing the illicit trade.

Both organized crime and terrorism cannot thrive in truly failed states and require some level of transportation and banking, and communication infrastructure and services (Menkhaus 2006). Weak law enforcement, spotty border security, and higher rates of corruption are not unique to developing states. Such conditions can exist in parts of transitional states and fully functional democracies (Makarenko 2004). Therefore, the extent to which illicit economy is likely to undermine the state (especially, its coercive capabilities) depends not only on the pre-existing institutional capacity, but also on the government's ability to forge relationship with and control the organized crime (Andreas 2015; Felbab-Brown 2018). Even when the intersections between crime and political violence are obvious, conclusions about state "weakness" engendering pervasive criminal and terrorist activities may be misguided. As discussed above, activities perceived as illegal by external actors may be deemed legitimate by local population. The sponsors of such "illicit" activities can ascend a political hierarchy to become important political actors. For some of these power brokers, main challenges will arise from other political rivals, especially those with ability to control the mechanisms of repression—army and institutions of security. In this context, state "weakness" exemplified by the impotence of law enforcement apparatus can be a consequence of deliberate efforts by the parts of state apparatus to emasculate their power rivals with control over coercive institutions or segments of illicit economy returning significant rents.

Although the crime–terror nexus often connects non-state actors and activities, nearly all of these interactions are enabled by, if not outwardly controlled by, state actors. Indeed, empirical analyses of the crime–terror nexus provide ample evidence of corruption and penetration of illicit economies into the state as a background for criminal–terrorist ties (Bayart, Ellis, and Hibou 1999). In many cases, the state becomes a part of the nexus itself, particularly where local government officials and political elites are involved in illicit economic activity and security apparatuses are used to support or oppose particular actors within the nexus (Barnes 2017; Arias 2018; Dammert and Sarmiento 2019; Omelicheva and Markowitz 2019b). The state, therefore, not only as a "failed" entity but also as an active, disaggregated set of actors that enable and overlap with criminal activity, plays an important role in theoretical story linking crime to terrorism. Instead of thinking about the state through the lens of strength or weakness, it is more productive to ask questions about the different modes of collaboration and confrontation between the state, organized crime, and other non-state violence actors. Several possible lines of research emerge. What are the different roles played by the state? How does the state use the discursive dimensions of violence—historically contingent mechanisms producing dominant discourses about terrorists and criminals—to sustain and legitimate those in power? If the state is not always combatting intersections of crime and terrorism, under what conditions do individuals or offices representing the state provide space for these groups to operate, distribute covert support, or even offer active assistance? How do these representatives of state authority (whether a regional official or a member of a security agency) engage in varying modes of collaboration and confrontation—modes that may exist simultaneously within a country—with organized crime and other non-state violent actors and to what effect?

Lastly, the crime–terror literature has traditionally viewed criminal fundraising as an alternative to state sponsorship. Preliminary research on the state-sponsored terrorism suggests that there has been a resurgence of state-sponsored violence and crime (Shaw 2019). What are the drivers of state-sponsored terrorist violence and how has it evolved over time? In Latin America, for example, criminal groups recruit violent entrepreneurs from military and paramilitary units with histories of



using indiscriminate violence and other forms of terrorism during counterinsurgency campaigns. Through this recruitment process, tactics of state terrorism are appropriated into the repertoires of criminal organizations (Johnson 2019).

*How Resource Structure Directs Opportunism within Illicit Economies*

The crime–terror nexus literature has described the links between organized crime and terrorism as mainly opportunistic. When crime promises high yield in revenue at a relatively low cost, terrorist groups are expected to engage in criminal activity or form “alliances of convenience” with criminal organizations when doing so carries the promise of assisting the terrorist groups in raising revenue (Hernández 2013; Clarke 2015; Thachuk 2018). Not only do terrorist groups become involved in crime due to a range of motivations, but an argument that presents terrorist and criminal groups as opportunistic actors leaves a critical question about the variation in their preferences unanswered. To put it differently, if all terrorist and insurgent groups need funds to survival, why do some groups engage in drug trafficking, oil smuggling, and human trafficking, but others do not? For example, ISIS was involved in the chilling campaign of enslavement and human trade endorsed by an official policy on treating the exploited women (Malik 2017). The Al Qaeda branch in Syria (also known as Al-Nusra and Jabhat Fateh al-Sham) operating next to and in competition with ISIS and other insurgent groups in Syria and Iraq has raised its revenue from kidnapping for ransom but has not been known for its participation in human trade (Fanusie and Entz 2017). Hezbollah has engaged in large-scale drug trafficking and smuggling of a variety of legal and illegal items. To this date, however, the group has stayed away from the human trafficking business (Fanusie and Entz 2017).

Significant advances have been made in understanding the role of organizational attributes in shaping groups’ preferences for crime. It has been demonstrated, for example, that group size, structure, leadership, lifespan, network density, ethnic/religious compatibility, control of territory, and the average member’s age account for variation in the terrorist groups’ involvement in crime (O’Brienn 2012; Asal, Brinton, and Schoon 2015; Perlinger and Palmieri 2019; see also Semmelbeck and Besaw 2020). It has also been suggested that groups’ organizational attributes can interact with the structure of resources, such as resource accessibility, concentration, and mobility of resource wealth (Asal, Rethemeyer, and Schoon 2019).

Early scholarship on the political economy of violence posited a strong correlation between high-value commodity exports and civil war (Collier and Hoeffler 2004), identifying several ways in which the structure of resource wealth can shape the nature of violence. For example, low barriers to entry to the economies of “lootable” resources, such as diamonds and illicit drugs, facilitate civil war and insurgent violence. In contrast cash crops and petroleum resource economies are commonly monopolized by state-owned enterprises and require access to technology and expertise to operate (Englebert and Ron 2004; Fearon 2005; Ross 2005; Snyder and Bhavnani 2005; Humphreys, Sachs, and Stiglitz 2007; Collier 2011).

This discussion of natural resources and conflict underscores the importance of understanding the nature of the resource that is the revenue source for a terrorist group, and how resource structure can interact with the organizational attributes of the groups, such as its control of territory, size, leadership, and others. Exploring the value chains of resources—their flow from the point of extraction through intermediaries and onto consumer markets—suggests that mobile forms of natural wealth with low barriers to entry into the illicit market and high value-to-weight ratios are more likely to be used for funding conflict and terrorism. This explanation leads one to expect that alluvial diamonds and other accessible minerals would be as appealing to terrorist groups as narcotics. There is, however, very limited evidence establishing a veritable connection between transnational terrorist groups, such as

Al Qaida and Hezbollah, and diamond smuggling (Raphaeli 2003; Levitt 2005). In contrast to a widespread assumption that terrorist networks have deep operational, logistical, and financial links with the production and trade of oil, diamonds, gold, and other mineral resources, few studies explicitly connect these resources to terrorist groups (FATF-GIABA-GABAC 2016; Østensen and Stridsman 2017).

There is more robust empirical support to connections between drug trafficking and terrorism (Piazza 2012; Omelicheva and Markowitz 2019a). A possible explanation for these divergent patterns of relations between a lootable resource and terrorist activity suggested by the conflict studies might have to do with export concentration and modes of extraction of natural wealth (Fearon 2004; Walsh et al. 2018; Conrad et al. 2018). Trafficking in illicit drugs (as opposed to their production through growing, harvesting, and extraction/purification/refinement processes in labs) is a mode of exploiting natural resources that is diffused and which gives terrorist groups greater mobility and flexibility. In addition to drug trafficking, other types of criminal activities, such as contraband, smuggling, and trafficking in secondary diamonds, are likely to afford terrorist groups the greater mobility and flexibility in finding alternative sources of supply of illicit and licit commodities, new markets, and routes of transportation. Terrorist groups, whose funding revenue comes from these activities, can be expected to be less vulnerable to counterterrorism policies targeting these sources of revenue. They are also more likely to survive external shocks affecting natural resources, such as natural disasters.

Diamonds, oil, copper, and other minerals, on the other hand, are known as the “point-source” natural resources extracted from a narrow geographic or economic base (Le Billon 2001). The concentration of these resources in geographically bound areas not only separates these economic “enclaves” from other parts of state economy creating significant barriers for entry for transnational terrorist groups (Dunning 2008), but also makes it easier for authorities to exercise or regain control over their extraction. In other words, diamonds and oil are more tractable, compared to illicit drugs. This affects the demand side of the equation as well making the customers of precious minerals more discerning than consumers of illicit drugs.<sup>6</sup> In addition, many point-source resources require institutional investment for extracting them that deprive terrorist groups of flexibility and mobility afforded by participation in trafficking and smuggling. Therefore, the type of criminal activity defined by resource structure and the mode of resource extraction conditions the relationship between crime and terrorism.

Understanding the nature of the resource structure within the broader illicit economy matters for devising approaches to countering the crime–terror nexus. Labor-intensive illicit economies, such as the cultivation of certain drug crops and logging, can employ hundreds of thousands of local residents and even attract migrant workers. Drug smuggling, human trafficking, or wildlife poaching are less labor intensive and serve employment needs of fewer people. Terrorist and insurgent groups’ sponsorship of labor-intensive illicit economies promises to afford them greater political capital than their support of economies that are based on non-intensive labor. This sponsorship, however, can put insurgents at loggerheads with the corrupt governments that often derive their authority and personal benefits from control over licit and illicit resources (Felbab-Brown 2017). As a result, certain extractive projects and drug crops’ eradication initiatives that disrupt local livelihoods and leave thousands of local residents without means of survival are not only ineffective, but also beneficial to terrorist and insurgent groups that can exploit communities’ grievances aimed at the official government institutions. In addition, security assistance projects that are remiss of the governments’ roles in illicit economies can inadvertently power corrupt local and national leaders and create a

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<sup>6</sup> We thank an anonymous reviewer for this observation.

perception of the complicity of international donors in corrupting the national and local elites.

*The Consequences of the Crime–Terror Nexus: Specifying the Outcomes*

What are the consequences of criminal–terrorist convergence? A shared position within the crime–terror nexus literature is that, by consolidating the financial base of terrorist groups, the criminal–terrorist intersections make terrorist organizations more durable and deadly and, therefore, amplify the risk of terrorism (Williams 2007; Hestermen 2013; Miklaucic and Brewer 2013; Carrapico, Irrera, and Tupman 2016; Petrich 2019). Some types of criminal activities, such as drug and human trafficking, can also boost strategic objectives of terrorist organizations (Avdan and Omelicheva 2021; Viano 2020). Terrorist groups can deploy the drug trade for inundating the enemy’s communities with narcotics (Hernández 2013) or resort to sexual violence and trade to demoralize and subjugate the adversary’s population (Kenny and Malik 2019). Acting alongside the terrorist organizations that control territory, organized criminal groups, too, can gain in their ability to move free of the government’s detection. New relationships with terrorist or insurgent organizations provide criminal actors with more opportunities to wage political violence against governments or support their terrorist counterparts in their stead (Clarke and Lee 2008).

It has also been argued that criminal–terrorist convergence has become a critical destabilizing factor in the global security environment and an amplifier of challenges for “weak” and “fragile” states. It has eroded state legitimacy and solvency (Sullivan 2012), thwarted economic growth and development of individual nations, and compromised “the sustainability of the planet” (Shelley 2014, 4–5). The illicit activities bolstered by crime and terrorism have contributed to the production of illegitimate wealth that is often hidden in offshore accounts (Sharman, Findley, and Nielson 2014; Cooley and Heathershaw 2017). By fueling some of the public frustration with corrupt governments, the criminal–terrorist convergence can lead to organized violence and regime change (Chayes 2015).

The conceptual and theoretical ambiguities surrounding the study of the crime–terror nexus (Do state weakness and illicit markets engender the criminal–terrorist convergence or result from it?) compounded by the challenges of gathering data at the operational level have impeded systematic assessment of its consequences and translation of general claims into empirically verifiable conclusions. Some affirmations about the criminal and terrorist groups’ ability to challenge states simply do not rest on solid evidence (Wolf 2017, 148). How does one separate the impact of crime–terror nexus from other determinants of organized violence and crime? What is the level of influence of different types of crime on terrorism relative to other factors? How are the effects of the crime–terror nexus mediated by the background conditions? And, what are the other consequences of the crime–terror nexus beyond the levels of violence and crime? The outcomes of the criminal–terrorist convergence remain, arguably, the least developed area of the scholarship on the crime–terror nexus, which has traditionally focused on exploring and describing the nature of connections between terrorism and crime.

First, as a step toward conceptualizing violence as an outcome of criminal–terrorist intersections and theorizing the relationship between the crime–terror nexus and its various consequences, it can be instructive to draw on the war economies literature’s distinction between the onset, duration, transformation, and termination of violence in civil wars. There has been a vibrant debate on war economies revolving around resource wealth as a major explanatory factor for the onset, continuation, and transformation of dynamics of violence (Collier 2000; Pugh and Cooper 2004; Ballentine and Nitzschke 2005; Lujala 2010; Le Billon 2012). Since the relationships between terrorist and criminal organiza-

tions often entail competition over access to resources, could illicit transactions, themselves, serve as a driver of violence? Under which conditions and which types of criminal–terrorist intersections—tactical, organizational, or others—result in violence that is a product of these groups’ engagement in illicit activities? What role, if any, do terrorist groups play in criminal groups’ appropriation of terrorist tactics? These are, but few questions probing the linkages between criminal–terrorist intersections and the onset of violence.

In the same ways as war violence transforms into the new forms of violent conduct following the conflict resolution, crime–terror orders may produce shifting dynamics of organized violence as well. Considerable advances have been made in exploring the processes according to which criminals facilitate or engage in jihadist activity (Kupatadze and Argomaniz 2019). Less is known about the movement in the opposite direction of the crime–terror continuum, namely, from terrorism to crime. The dismantlement of ISIS and the problems associated with the return and reintegration of foreign fighters offer fruitful avenues for examining violent conduct transformation. Limited evidence suggests that when rehabilitation and reintegration efforts fail, the former fighters slip into the world of petty and violent crime (Govier and Boutland 2020). In addition, the refugee camps and prisons present unique sites with the seeds of future violence. A recent concern, for example, is several thousand children who were born or raised on the territory previously controlled by ISIS. Claiming nationality from dozens of countries, the children of the Islamic State carry a stigma and are frequently unwanted by their parents’ home states. With no alternative and no future, this next generation of the “cubs of the Caliphate” (Bloom 2015) may become the most enduring demographic and security legacy of the Islamic State. Drawing on insights from the literature on war economies and leveraging multiple methods and technologies, the future studies of the crime–terror nexus can explore both the vulnerabilities of detained populations to criminalization and radicalization, and the transformation of crime–terror orders characterized by conflict-related bombings, assassinations, massacres, and kidnappings into the post-conflict orders with high levels of illicit activities, asocial behavior, domestic violence, and street crime.

Second, while illicit economies have been identified as significant drivers of conflict, efforts at dismantling them have been neither necessary nor sufficient for defeating insurgencies or reducing violence (Connable and Libicki 2010).<sup>7</sup> Similarly, the reduction in funding for a terrorist organization does not guarantee its demise. The ending of terrorist groups requires a range of policy instruments. The most effective include political negotiations resulting in a terrorist group joining the political process and careful police and intelligence work involving arrests and liquidations of key members of terrorist organizations (Jones and Libicki 2008; Weinberg and Perlinger 2010). Certain characteristics of terrorist groups, such as their bureaucratization and substantial levels of communal support, increase their resilience to leadership decapitation (Jordan 2014). State repression by authoritarian governments has also shown to be effective in reducing the lifespan of terrorist groups (Daxecker and Hess 2012). Therefore, simply cutting off a source of criminal revenue for a terrorist group or dismantling criminal–terrorist collaboration may not result in the cessation of violence or in the end of a terrorist group.<sup>8</sup> As discussed above, terrorist groups that rely on diffused natural resources or illicit activities that afford them greater mobility and flexibility in financial revenue substitution are

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<sup>7</sup> Civil wars tend to reproduce, reinforce, and transform some of the drivers of war-related violence in the post-conflict contexts, such as institutional weaknesses, corruption, and structural inequalities, in this way shaping post-war crime and violence (Kurtenbach and Rettberg 2018).

<sup>8</sup> The scholarship on longevity of terrorist groups shows that a group’s number of relationships, i.e., the number of other groups that the terrorist group cooperates with is more important than to whom the group is connected. Theoretically, cooperation’s effect on terrorist groups’ survivability is account for by their role in mitigating mobilization, rather than funding, concerns (Phillips 2014).

more resilient to government repression and external shocks. In addition to the structure of illicit economy, the role that the state plays in it also conditions the outcomes of criminal–terrorist intersections.

Third, the political economy of violence literature has brought in relatively new material on the relationship linking criminal violence to governance and political order. While long associated with protection rackets that later became states (Tilly 1985), criminal structures engaging in governance are increasingly seen as emerging actors within conflict settings. Recent works on insurgent organizations in Colombia (Arjona 2016), Sudan, Sri Lanka, and Democratic Republic of Congo (Mampilly 2011) have demonstrated how non-state actors build political order in areas they control. While criminal organizations are typically viewed—in both crime–terror studies and the broader literature on violence—as actors who benefit from gaps in state control, they in fact control neighborhoods and impact various forms of everyday governance from local markets and street-level security to municipal elections (Arias 2018). Criminal governance can even be extended from within state institutions, such as prison (Lessing and Willis 2019). In short, recent empirical studies within the economies of violence literature introduce various forms of governance and political order that may, or may not, require controlling territory. These insights illuminate an important aspect of violence as a produce of the crime–terror nexus that has been largely overlooked.

Fourth, there are also important insights from the political economy of violence literature on accounting for variation in the type and targeting of violence stemming from the crime–terror intersections. A number of studies found that resource-rich environments tend to foster indiscriminate forms of violence (and the wider targeting of civilians) by insurgents, war combatants, and terrorist groups alike (Weinstein 2007; Shapiro 2013; Salehyan, Siroky, and Wood 2014; Zhukov 2017). Other works identified political causes such as regime type (Lacina 2006; Downes 2008), professionalized militias (Downes 2008), and local political rivalries (Balcells 2017). Taken together, these political and economic factors provide a useful point of departure for inquiries into patterns and targeting of violence within the crime–terror nexus.

### Conclusion

Since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the focus on transnational crime was eclipsed by a focus on international terrorism. The narrative of a growing convergence of terrorism and organized crime offered a powerful rhetorical device for shifting attention (and public resources) back to transnational networks of crime. As a result, the crime–terror nexus perspective became influential in academic and policy circles. This narrative also has had unintended consequences. It offered clear solutions that did not account for the complex challenges of terrorism; it generated a wealth of policy proposals that were often premised on forces of globalization or zones of disorder within weak states; and many governments purportedly plagued by the “crime–terror nexus” have picked up the narrative as a smokescreen for their own involvement in predatory economies. This politicization of the narrative has not only limited the analytical utility of the crime–terror nexus concept and related frameworks, but also contributed to its independence from other social scientific approaches to the empirical study of violence. By situating the crime–terror nexus within broader literatures on violence, this paper hopes to advance this important topic of study.

Designed to explore and describe the variety of criminal and terrorist intersections, the early scholarship on the crime–terror nexus produced valuable typologies distinguishing tactical from organizational linkages, and the convergence of social milieus from which criminals and terrorists draw their recruits. Yet, this literature has evolved in ways that can benefit from a critical reassessment. In this article, we



drew on the political economy of violence literature to gain a better understanding of three areas of inquiry that can inform future studies of the crime–terror nexus: (1) the non-state actors that form the “nexus,” (2) the structural conditions under which a “nexus” emerges, and (3) the outcomes of violence produced by criminal–terrorist intersections. In addressing each of these, we utilize insights from the rich scholarship on economies of violence to demonstrate a small sample of theoretical and conceptual venues that can be used to examine more systematically the complex interactions between terrorism, illicit economies, and crime. Among other insights from these approaches, our reassessment identified the ties that criminal and terrorist actors have to their localities, and the relationships of competition that characterize those ties. In unpacking the conditions under which the crime–terror nexus may emerge and take shape, we emphasized the critical mediating role of the state as well as how the structure of resource economies influences the preferences of insurgent groups for crime and the consequences of terrorist–criminal convergence. Lastly, we drew on the political economy of violence to specify different dimensions along which outcomes might be assessed: the onset, duration, and termination of violence; the type and targeting of attacks; and the varying forms of governance and political order arising from crime and violence.

As can be seen in the discussion above, understanding the nexus between crime and terrorism is an inherently interdisciplinary endeavor, drawing on many fields of study. These not only include political science, economics, and criminology, but also specific debates on topics such as legitimacy, resource politics, and state power. Moreover, this subject also requires the use of a diversity of methodological approaches, ranging from quantitative analysis, GIS, and related geospatial methods to comparative case studies and ethnographic research in individual localities. While it has gained considerable currency in policy circles, the study of crime and terrorism has not developed a body of theory commensurate with its real-world relevance. A deeper understanding of the crime–terror nexus can be obtained through interdisciplinary theory building and methodological diversity.

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