

Introduction to Special Issue - Understanding and Conceptualising European jihadists: criminals, extremists or both?

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The nexus between crime and terrorism has been debated ever since Alex Schmid wrote his ground-breaking article on the issue in 1996. Since then the disagreements have deepened as to under what conditions terrorists and criminals collaborate or when and why terrorists decide to develop their in-house capacity to implement criminal activities (Williams 2008). Some have claimed that the intensity of interaction between crime and terrorism may well be exaggerated (Hübschle, 2011, Ruggiero 2017) but, by and large, scholars working on this topic have emphasised the importance of this connection.

An important part of debate has revolved around the issue of whether the crime-terror nexus flourishes in weak states (Makarenko 2004, Piazza 2008) or if, on the other hand, technological advancement in richer countries provides the necessary infrastructure (roads, telecommunications etc) for successful collaboration (Asal et al., 2016). Indeed lax financial regulations and white collar crime in the developed world is seen by Shelley (2014) as key enablers of the crime-terror interaction. It is safe to assume that, given the relative sophistication of law enforcement structures in these countries, criminal-terrorist networks are likely to be more professional and more apt to prevent apprehension. For these reasons, it could be argued that the crime-terror nexus in Europe (and developed countries) deserve at least as much attention as this phenomenon in weak and failed states.

Much of the literature on the nexus has traditionally focused on how terrorists and organised criminals forge alliances, exchange favours and services, or use terror or criminal methods to further their primary goals. These models treat extremists and criminals as separate organisational entities with distinct aims and methods that sometimes establish fluid and constantly changing relationships or may converge in terms of tactics and behaviour (Makarenko 2004, Picarelli 2012, Dishman 2005). The critique of crime-terror nexus emphasized that criminals and terrorists usually engage in temporary and opportunistic joint ventures and the relationship rarely develops into something deep and transformative (Hutchinson & O'Malley, 2007; Williams, 2008).

However, the recent terrorist attacks in Europe that followed the rise of ISIS, and which had featured perpetrators with a background in petty crime, represent a challenge for this scholarship. This is not necessarily a new phenomenon (the Al-Qaeda in Iraq founder al-Zarqawi had, for example, a background in crime (Zelin 2014)) but the closer overlap evident in this more recent wave of attacks have led some to argue that the relationship between terrorism and crime has evolved to one of symbiosis rather than nexus (ICCT 2017, Sylvester 2017). They engage in two forms of critique: First, it is claimed that the crime-terror nexus literature underestimates the role of petty criminals and focuses predominantly on organised crime. Second, it is argued that the idea of a nexus or a continuum does not do justice to the confluence of petty criminals with extremists (Basra & Neumann 2016). The goal of this special issue is precisely to take this critique as a point of departure to better understand the processes according to which petty criminals facilitate or engage in jihadist activity in Europe.

Clearly, the current overlap between criminals and jihadis is striking. One study that analysed 47 cases of jihadist inspired violence carried out in Western countries between January 1, 2012 and June 12, 2016 found that half of the attackers had a criminal past (Mullins 2016, pp.26-30). According to another study, at least 57% of attackers had a prior criminal background in a sample of 51 successful attacks throughout Europe and North

America from June 2014, when the ISIS Caliphate was declared, until June 2017 (Vidino, Marone, Entenmann 2017). In fact, in a 2106 assessment of the ISIS Modus Operandi, Europol claimed that, by July 2016, as many as “816 individuals have been reported to Europol both for terrorism-related offenses and for involvement in serious and/or organised crime.”

Research suggests that the overwhelming majority of perpetrators of recent jihadi terrorist attacks who had a criminal history were involved in low-level criminality (Flemish Institute 2018). Most of the foreign fighters joining ISIS are believed to be ‘foot soldiers’ in organized crime (Gallagher 2016) but some of these fighters were not part of any criminal groups even though they might have had experience committing minor felonies (GLOBSEC 2018a). At the same time, they generally do not succeed in moving up the militant groups’ hierarchy either: one study looking at the sample of 100 jihadi leaders from Africa and Middle East, found that individuals with prison experience and a criminal record rarely make it to the top of the network. The report finds that most of these leaders’ convictions are related to jihadi activity instead (Centre on Religion&Geopolitics 2016).

However, the fact that criminal and terrorist networks overlap does not mean that previous experience with criminality is necessary and/or sufficient condition for becoming a violent extremist. Neither it should imply that terrorists always recruit from criminal networks based on pre-existing collaborative links. Furthermore there are interesting variations across European countries. For example, in France nearly 50% of the jihadis in Oliver Roy’s database, have a history of petty crime – mainly drug dealing, but also acts of violence and, less frequently, armed robbery (Roy 2017a). According to the German Federal Police, around two-thirds (504 persons out of 778) of German foreign fighters had a criminal record: “at least 53% had been convicted for three or more offences while nearly two-third (32%) had been associated with six or more criminal offences” (Federal Criminal Police, 2017, p.18). 47% of the Dutch foreign fighters in a dataset of 140 individuals were convicts (Hegghammer 2016). In another study from Spain, one-third of foreign fighters have a criminal past (García-Calvo & Reinares 2016). Such variation across studies may suggest that differences between European domestic contexts may have an effect on the crime-terror relationship.

‘Overlapping ecosystems’ and ‘melting pots’

The two major studies examining the crime-terror nexus have categorised extant research on the topic into two types that we could broadly be described as organisational and social.¹ The first, or more traditional perspective, focuses on the tactical or organisational convergence between criminal and terrorist groups, potential forms of cooperation between these organisations, strategic and tactical similarities and differences, etc. The other, more recent, approach leaves aside formalised collaboration but finds that criminals and terrorists recruit from sociologically similar pools of people. We argue that, by and large, recent evidence of overlap in Europe can be best explained by the latter argument (converging social networks) rather than the more formal organisational approaches. In fact, this has been recognised by European authorities, as illustrated in D’Amato’s paper for this issue, which highlights how the official discourse in France has resulted in the ‘individualization of the threat’, the representation of the ‘radicalised’ individual as a threat.

We also believe that, along with carefully examining larger social milieus, *looking at individual pathways* has the most potential to do justice to the complexity of the problem.

¹ See the details of the project ‘From Criminals to Terrorists and Back?’ at <https://www.globsec.org/publications/criminals-terrorists-back/>; for further information about the Crime Terror Nexus study visit <https://crimerrornexus.com>

There are myriad ways in which criminals travel the pathway of radicalization and a rigid focus on organisations, groups or even on fluid networks does not explain specific cases. As one of the GLOBSEC (2018b, p.18) report concludes ‘one struggles to find an overarching life story’ amongst former criminals turning jihadists.

As we have argued before, most of the crime-terror literature under the previous paradigm neglects the existence of lower-level interactions occurring outside static and predetermined organizational settings. Exceptions exist: some of that research has considered the links between ideological and non-ideological actors interacting within the fluid structure of broader social networks (Belli et al., 2015). However, it is fair to say, that analyses that focus on the individual level are much more common in the new wave of research on the topic. This is a very important distinction, since, as a 2016 ICSR study found, “it is not the merging of criminals and terrorists as organisations but of their social networks, environments, or milieus. Criminal and terrorist groups have come to recruit from the same pool of people, creating (often unintended) synergies and overlaps that have consequences for how individuals radicalise and operate.” The same report talks about prisons, suburban areas of European cities and other social settings as the key hubs facilitating this collusion.

What we want to argue is that, in order to advance our understanding of the problem, a connection should be made to classic criminological theory. In this way, local neighbourhoods (eg. Malenbeek in Brussels), European jails, and/or sport clubs can be understood as ‘offender convergence settings’ in the worlds of criminologist Marcus Felson (2006). These settings constitute places for fostering socialisation, cooperation and confluence of deviant actors. They may provide the basis for the emergence of short or long-term co-offending networks: Felson’s theory emphasizes that certain places or settings cultivate a regenerating pool of potential accomplices through facilitating informal unstructured activity (Felson 2003, 2006). These settings may produce co-offending as only a by-product of socializing, but they also provide a platform for criminal planning by offenders with crime in mind (Felson 2006). This notion is directly applicable to a variety of European cases: Indeed, the value of ‘offender convergence settings’ as a framework to study this subject has been highlighted in this special issue by Panayotov and Argomaniz and Bermejo in their Bulgarian and Spain case studies .

A RAND report (2017 p. 31) has used the term ‘Islamogangsterism’ to describe Tunisian suburbs where the presence of Jihadists overlaps in crime-ridden environments with various types of illicit trade. Shaw and Mahadevan (2018) call similar types of places “insecure spaces”, where governance is contested and “distinctions between terror and mafia-style organized crime are beginning to break down.” At the same time, as the piece by Illian and Sandberg for this collection makes clear, the term ‘Islamogangsterism’ is useful to describe the neighborhoods in the Western European capitals as well. More than 70 percent of the fighters joining ISIS from Sweden have been residents of an ‘exposed areas’ of Swedish cities (socially deprived areas hit by high criminality and low socio-economic status) (Gustafsson, & Ranstorp 2017). Higgins speaks of the ‘grimy’ Molenbeek district of Brussels, where the lines between criminality and jihadi violence are blurred (Higgins 2015). Molenbeek is also a hub of counterfeit trade (UNIFAB 2016, pp. 15-16). Such overlap between deprived neighborhoods with disenfranchised youth, illicit markets and petty crime is also observed in other suburban settings of European cities (Weggemans, Bakker and Grol 2014). As Louise Shelley observes in Paris, several northern neighbourhoods close to where some of the November 2015 attacks occurred have large-scale markets where illicit products are sold (Shelley 2015b).

Beyond the specific neighborhoods and districts, European prisons as well as other social settings (gyms, cafes, restaurants) have been ‘melting pots’: grounds for forging links between criminals and terrorists. For example Mohammad Siddique Khan, the organizer of

7/7 bombings in London, is known to recruit jihadists in the gyms and Islamic bookshop that he established (Bokhari et al. 2006). Reinares and García-Calvo (2013) explain how jihadi recruits in Spain would coalesce in places as mundane as hairdressers, clothing and food shops or internet cafés usually located in the same neighbourhood. Similar examples of ‘overlapping ecosystems’ abound across this special issue and Panayatov -very importantly- points out, for instance, the role that mosques can play in radicalisation in the absence of effective regulation.

As for radicalisation in prisons - European penitentiaries have long been known to have become incubators for radical Islamism (Pantucci 2017) and some even dubbed them as ‘jihad universities’² (Selby 2017). Apart from being a ‘convergence setting’, prisons are also ‘places of vulnerability’ where one can find a myriad of susceptible individuals who seek either new identity, camaraderie, protection from other inmates or just better food (Neumann 2010, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2010). In many instances this leads to inmates becoming radicalised under the influence of other jihadi prisoners. As recent research by Rushchenko (2018 and this special issue) shows, prisons in Europe that house extremists have opened new channels of communications and new political perspectives for offenders convicted for non-ideological crimes.

Using Felson’s ‘convergence settings’ as a conceptual framework to cross the bridge between terrorism studies and criminology, we argue that the broader phenomenon of crime-terror melting pots can be broken down into three processes when examined through the lens of European jihadism: functional confluence (skills exchange, social learning and provision of services), financial confluence (funding for terrorism derived from criminal activity) and ideological confluence (criminals turned violent extremists who follow an ideology that justifies political violence along religious lines). In other words: the crime-terror confluence that develops in convergence settings has three dimensions. We will develop further this typology next but not before clarifying first that, even if we see these three notions as useful analytical distinctions, that does not mean that in reality these three patterns do not overlap. On the contrary, we do observe that more than one form of confluence can be present in particular plots or individual pathways to violence. An example is the 11-M network (Reinares 2014) where forms of functional (smugglers provided the explosives to the jihadist cell), financial (these explosives were paid with drugs) and ideological confluence (some members were radicalised in prison) coalesced.

Functional confluence

The functional relationship between criminals and terrorists can be predominantly based on the straightforward exchange of goods and services or the learning process from the skillsets of each other (European Parliament 2012). There are many studies in the traditional crime-terror literature explaining how criminals are beneficial for terrorist networks. Criminals sometimes have ‘competitive advantage’ in the provision of illicit goods and services such as forged documents, smuggled weapons or clandestine travel assistance (National Intelligence Council 2004, Picarelli 2012). Terrorists may either purchase these services from the skilled criminals or may try to develop in-house capacity by recruiting criminals with the relevant experience (Neumann and De Frias 2017). Either way this optimises and eases the execution of a crime from the perspective of rational choice criminology. Joining forces to commit a crime is expected to be easier and more efficient than going solo about it (Walsh 1986, McCarthy et al. 1998).

² See also: Daily Telegraph 2015. What is going wrong in France’s prisons? January 15, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/france/11352268/What-is-going-wrong-in-Frances-prisons.html>

Traditionally, there are varied potential motives why terrorists would seek collaborative links with organized criminals that go further than access to specialized knowledge or services (e.g. money laundering) or goods and materials (e.g. guns and ammunition). Performing tasks for criminal groups could also be a method to diversify revenue sources and to increase their operational funds. The links may also bring terrorist networks into contact with a wider range of potential recruits (European Parliament 2012, Schmid 2018).

The concept of reputation, an essential commodity in organised crime, is also important here. As Gallagher (2018) explains “if the relationship were to involve criminals and terrorists from a shared background, the former’s ‘stock’ might actually rise through benefit of association with ‘the cause’.”³ The backing of a powerful armed organisation can raise the profile of a criminal group or individual, especially if this organisation benefits from a positive image within a (diaspora) community. So the working relationships between groups developed in “offender convergence settings” may be facilitated by the reputational gains for organized criminals that come with their connections to militants.

Alex Schmid (2018) distinguishes between various levels of intensity in the interactions between organised crime and terrorism ranging from ad hoc, opportunistic relations to more regular tactical collaboration and even symbiosis. In practice, it is often difficult to distinguish between the separate stages of opportunistic collaboration, regular association or alliance formation. Mere co-existence may even be confused with interaction and this notion adds nuance to the idea of ‘overlapping ecosystems’: it clarifies that, as most recent research has shown, [the fact that] terrorist groups operate within [the same] illicit spaces does not always indicate a genuine connection, let alone an alliance between organized crime and terrorist groups’ (Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime 2018).

The issue of trust cannot be ignored here (Tremblay 1993) which is a rare commodity in illicit underworld. Militant groups need to ensure both trust and secrecy in their operations and these are affected by engaging in cooperation with a criminal group. But it could be argued that common experience in ‘convergence settings’ has the potential to solve the trust issue. This is because functional confluence (collaboration, training or provision of paid services between criminals and terrorists) can occur at different levels: whereas in the ‘traditional’ nexus literature it is assumed to take place between organisations, the most recent research looks at cooperation between individuals or small informal groups. This is important because the costs involved in partnering with external actors -the possibility that militants’ operations become compromised- may be somewhat alleviated in these instances (it is obviously easier to act undetected when the numbers of individuals involved are small). And, in principle, the long-term connections that are facilitated by the existence of ‘convergence settings’ could foster the necessary trust.

Financial confluence

Business of terrorism studies are an important part of the first generation crime-terror nexus literature as they explore how organised crime is a source of terrorism funding. There is increasing consensus in the wider expert and law enforcement community that terrorist networks benefit from small and large scale illicit trade (Naim 2010, Melzer and Martin 2015). Even though some academics have argued that ‘there is no abundance of evidence substantiating the claim’ that terrorist finance is related with illicit trade (van Dijck 2007),

³ He uses the example of James ‘Whitey’ Bulger, a Boston-based organised criminal whose arms smuggling on behalf of the IRA made him a powerful figure. As we will see in the ideological confluence section, this is also an important notion for current European jihadists.

others anticipate that ‘terrorist groups and their sympathisers will become even more involved in counterfeiting and piracy in the future’ (Lowe 2006, Black Market Watch 2015). Illegal trade in commercial products (defined as production, trafficking and distribution of counterfeit and diverted products, including products that are legally produced but illegally sold, such as illicit whites; and, illegally produced and illegally sold goods) have been expanding over the past decade. As one report concludes: the ‘growing power of terrorist groups is linked to their ability to generate revenue from numerous criminal activities with almost complete impunity’ (GSCP 2016).

Most of the literature on the link between illicit trafficking and terrorist organisations focus on how extremist actors behave as organised criminal networks in facilitating medium or large-scale, often cross-border trafficking activity. It is now known that organisations such as the FARC, IRA, PKK, Hezbollah, terrorist groups in sub-Saharan Africa, and ISIS, all have been reported to be involved in the illicit transnational trade in tobacco products (Turan 2011, Melzer and Martin 2015, WHO 2015, US Department of State 2015). After the rise of ISIS some studies claimed that this organisation has been the most financially successful terrorist group because of its ability to rip benefits from illicit trade in oil and other goods (Shelley 2015a) as well as extorting a protection fee from the smugglers of various kinds. For example one study has demonstrated how ISIS has been taxing the human smugglers engaged in lucrative business of moving Syrian refugees to Europe (Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime 2016). Moreover a recent UN Security Council report (2018: 22) highlights how, as ISIS loses its quasi-state streams of income, it is expected to turn to other forms of crime to finance its operations such as “kidnapping for ransom, petty crime, credit and insurance fraud and financial crimes over the Internet.”

There are many reasons why illegal trade can be attractive for criminals and terrorists: low entry barriers in the market, low priority for law enforcement and hence low prosecution of offenders, high profits despite low risk, lack of regional and international law enforcement cooperation against this type of trafficking activity (OECD 2015). At the same time this is a highly lucrative business. The projected value of internationally traded counterfeit goods stands at U.S. \$770–960 billion in 2015 according to some studies (Black Market Watch 2015), and the magnitude of counterfeiting ranges between 5% and 10% of the legal trade in physical goods (Transcrime, 2013). Yet relying on illicit transnational trade does also have its risks as it opens more possibilities for states to cooperate at the international level to clamp down on these groups, since prosecutors can choose to bring charges for criminal instead of terrorist offences, as Paulussen and van der Wilt explain in this volume.

Most relevant to this special issue, the most recent literature has highlighted that terrorist acts can be cheap and hence the little money generated from low-scale criminal activity can be sufficient to finance their operations in Europe (Norwegian Defence Research Establishment 2015, Shelley 2015c). Indeed the ‘affordability’ of these attacks (sometimes involving nothing more than knives and/or a rented vehicle) allows the network of small groups of violent extremists (Sageman 2004) that characterise European jihadism to operate without the patronage of foreign actors such as Al Qaeda and ISIS. Crime (and limited licit funds) permits individuals or networks to operate autonomously and self-sufficiently and carry out attacks that, albeit low-cost, can generate serious social alarm.

There is much evidence of the use of criminal funding for jihadist networks in Europe. A high-profile Norwegian study found that 38% of 40 jihadi cells in Europe for the 1994-2013 period funded themselves, at least partly, through crime; either thefts and robberies or illicit trade in various legal and illegal goods (Ofteidal 2015). A more recent analysis for the 2014-16 period found that the percentage of ISIS plots that had been financed wholly or partly

through crime was 23%, a decrease probably caused by natural variability⁴ (Nesser, Stenersen & Oftedal 2016). Petty crime was one of the sources of funding travel to Syria among the foreign fighters examined by Magnus Normark and Magnus Ranstorp (2015). Indeed Pierre de Bousquest de Florian, chief of Frances Directorate of Territorial Security has been quoted (in Rosella 2004) to have said that ‘most of the extremist structures that we have dismantled have been financed by crime.’ Belgian extremist Khalid Zerkani actively encouraged his recruits and members of his network to engage in all kinds of petty crime to raise money for the jihad (Van Vlierden 2016). In France, the attacker of the Thalys train, Ayoub El-Khazzani, had a record as a petty drug trafficker and one of the terrorists involved in the attack on Charlie Hebdo traded in counterfeit trainers and cigarettes (Shelley 2015a). Many other similar examples abound in the contributions to this special issue.

Ideological confluence

The dominant explanations in the original crime-terror nexus literature suggest that criminals and terrorists are separate type of actors who are driven by different motivations (ideology vs. profit). However the more recent trends have led to the emergence of new research challenging this assumption and showing how these lines blur in European jihadism while highlighting the fluidity of these labels and how an individual can move into one of these identities (and back) far more easily than initially assumed by previous studies.

This view would suggest that engagement in terrorism is just a progression from one type of illegal behaviour to another and is conditioned by a deviant response to general deprivation, poverty and marginalization (Coolsaet 2016). There is compelling empirical evidence behind the argument. For instance, Ljujic, van Prooijen and Weerman (2017) found that low socio-economic status is generally prevalent in their sample of Dutch and European jihadist. The majority of cases had only completed secondary school (or lower) and were unemployed in the year of offending.

The manner in which ideology operates in the process is up for debate. In an influential exchange with Gilles Kepel, the well-known French sociologist Oliver Roy (2017b) has suggested that the best perspective to understand the new breed of homegrown terrorism post-1995 is the ‘Islamisation of radicalism’ rather than the ‘radicalisation of Islam’. Rik Coolsaet (2016, p. 22) calls this the fourth wave of terrorism and conceptualizes it as an extension of “inner-city” gang phenomenon: the former middle-class intellectuals of previous jihadist waves have been replaced with petty criminals from disadvantaged backgrounds who mix gangsta and jihadist cultures (see also Ilan and Sandberg in this issue). Indeed Alan Gringard (quoted in Cruickshank 2017, p. 8) called ISIS a ‘super-gang,’ a type of criminal grouping that attracts young Muslim [and non-Muslim] men with a history of delinquency.⁵

In Gringard’s view a distorted interpretation of Islam is just ‘legitimizing their radical approach’. In effect extremist groups offer redemption and camaraderie to dangerous young men who had previously found their sense of belonging in street gangs: a grand cause allows them to transcend their status as ordinary delinquents (ICSR 2016). More specifically it has been argued that ISIS has focused on this recruiting strategy more than al Qaeda, attracting disenfranchised young people by giving them a new home, purpose and direction (Watts 2016).

⁴ The authors explain in the paper how, historically, there has been substantial variation on these figures from year to year.

⁵ See, referring to a quote by Alain Grignard.

The relationship between crime, terrorism and religious-like ideology is complex and, in some cases -as it always has been the case with militants- recruits may be more influenced by purely personal and pragmatic motives, which include trying to escape marginal status, looking for adventure, or looking at ISIS as a form of employment (Neumann 2015). But, all in all, it is hard to deny that jihadist doctrine has been very effectively applied to facilitate the transition between one role (criminal) to another (jihadist) due to the greater sense of individual self-worth that provides without necessarily changing the person's previous routines and practices .

In this regard, there are many cases when leaders of extremists groups actually encourage their members to engage in crime against infidels. For example Bakar Bashir, leader of Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) reportedly said, "you can take their blood; then why not take their property?" (Kaplan 2005) Anwar al-Awlaki wrote in Jihadist outlet Inspire magazine "rather than the Muslims financing their jihad from their own pockets, they should finance it from the pockets of their enemies" (Inspire 2011). From this perspective crime is actually a form of Jihad and criminal activity is not only permitted but actively encouraged (Neumann and De Frias 2017).

This is not a merely academic debate, this question has important practical consequences. Returnees from conflicts in Syria and Iraq with an offender past may re-join existing criminal networks and apply their military skills and training to strengthen them (Gallagher 2016, Clark 2018) Foreign fighters have the potential to become extremely dangerous criminals but the connection can also go in the opposite direction. Criminals can also be good jihadists for one reason – their experience with crime helps with Jihad: Criminals are already good at evading police surveillance and planning discreet logistics (ICSR 2016). Furthermore criminals, especially those with the background in violent crime, require less conditioning and grooming to overcome the inhibitions about breaking the law. Hence, they are more easily 'socialised into terrorism' (Lloyd and Dean 2015). The focus here is on learning process: As Sutherland's (1947) theory of Differential Association predicts, repeated and sustained interaction may facilitate social learning and skills exchange between criminals and terrorists. The frequency and duration of the relationship defines the intensity of involvement in crime as well as techniques of committing it (Sutherland 1947). In conjunction with Felson's offender convergence setting this is a useful tool to account for the crime-terror overlapping ecosystems.

Organisation of the special issue

The articles in this issue address the problem from different perspectives and it is this variety of approaches what we believe constitute the key strength of this publication project. Another is the multidisciplinary of the team, with contributors approaching the problem from a multitude of standpoints including Criminology, Sociology, Law and Politics. An associated benefit of this heterogeneity is that it has reinforced the originality and value of this collective work by examining areas of the problem hitherto unexplored and/or bringing into the discussion concepts and frameworks that had not been employed yet in this area but can be very useful tools to facilitate our understanding.

Argomaniz and Bermejo's contribution demonstrate how the three confluences model that we have presented in the Introduction can be applied fruitfully to the analysis of a particular case study. Drawing on this conceptual framework and Felson's offender convergence settings theory, the authors have examined the crime and terror overlap present in some of the most important jihadist plots developed in Spain over the last 15 years. The authors explain how the analysis of the Spanish case corroborates the most recent findings on this

subject emerging from other European contexts. That is to say, that the overlap between crime and terror occurs mainly at the level of jihadi grass-root networks.

The ideological confluence dimension is particularly evident in several Spanish examples. A significant number of individuals with criminal pasts have smoothly transitioned into jihadism both inside and outside prisons, the latter representing a significant concern for the authorities, leading to important changes in the way these prisoners are handled and monitored. Financial confluence has also been present in several plots (both successful and foiled) and in the activities of different cells dismantled by the Spanish authorities. Jihadists have engaged in a wide variety of illicit activities (mainly robbery; benefit, credit and identity fraud; and, most frequently, drug trafficking) to fund both terrorist organisations abroad and attacks inside the country. Functional confluence has been facilitated in certain neighbours affected by marginalisation and deprivation that have become melting pots for criminals and violent extremists. Yet, importantly, the authors also found that the more traditional understanding of functional confluence (organised criminals collaborating with terrorist groups for profit) was far less prevalent in Spanish jihadism than the individual transition from petty crime into terrorism -or ideological confluence- that the 'new' literature highlights.

Ilan and Sandberg's article does also show the value of a rigorous effort at theorising this issue, in this instance drawing on the work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. By applying the Bourdieusian notions of capital, habitus, and field to the analysis of jihadi gangsterism, the authors have delivered an innovative explanation for this phenomenon. A key concept in Ilan and Sandberg's analysis is that of social capital, in the sense that participation in violent jihadism is a powerful source of street capital in certain areas of European cities as it gives the individual an elevated status with their peers. The relationship could also be understood in the other direction: individuals with high street social capital can become more valuable for jihadist recruiters and can therefore be seen as a form of capital that facilitates the shift into violent extremism.

Moreover this move from street gangs/petty criminals to militancy is also helped by habitus, that is to say, the continuities and similarities in lifestyle that exist in any violent context, present both in some deprived European neighbourhood and Syrian or Iraqi conflict settings. In other words, there is often "a 'pre-existing' habituation into practices of violence and threat" for European foreign fighters. There are therefore attitudes and behaviours present both in the 'street' and 'jihadi' fields that can smooth the evolution from one identity to the other. Ilan and Sandberg's paper demonstrates, in sum, how concepts derived from European Sociological theory can enrich our understanding of a relationship between crime, street culture, and contemporary violent jihadism that is a central part of the process of ideological confluence that we described above.

On the other hand, in D'Amato's paper the theoretical angle is informed by constructivist and critical approaches to security. Her paper does not look at jihadist activity *per se* but at the states' responses to such activity, and, more specifically, at how the discourses by actors dealing with the fight against terrorism have addressed the criminal terror nexus. In other words, how the authorities perceive and construct the threat at the discursive level. Importantly, this is an area of the literature on the intersection between crime and terrorism that had remained hitherto unexplored. Drawing on more than 150 public documents, the paper has deconstructed the discursive practices of French policy-makers and brought to light the dominant interpretations of terrorism and their evolution.

The conclusion is that French decision-makers have understood terrorism as "a sort of 'islamisation of criminal behaviour", that is to say, for the French authorities, terrorism has become the product of an overlap between religion and social exclusion/marginalisation. In other words, for the dominant discourse, jihadi terrorism is the space where religious

practices and beliefs meet (and justify) criminal behaviour. These characteristics are juxtaposed against Republican values, norms and identity to the extent that the nexus is progressively understood and discussed as “a threat to national values more than to citizens’ physical safety”. We would argue that this representation of terrorism in the official discourse as an “extreme form of religious criminality” has important practical implications: How the threat is understood and communicated has a direct bearing on which policy options are socially and politically acceptable, and therefore available to the state.

In his contribution, Panayotov examines a case (Bulgaria) that has been neglected for too long in a literature that has been focused on Western Europe. Applying both the notion of ‘melting pots’ and ‘offender convergence settings’ to the relationship between radicalisation and crime in Bulgaria, the paper explores how social deprivation and organised crime activities have interacted with violent extremism in urban areas of the country. An individual example, the ‘case of the Thirteen Imams’, has been examined in detail to highlight how these dimensions reinforce each other in practice: we can observe here evidence of both financial and ideological confluence.

Some of the interesting insights from this piece include: that the levels of poverty and deprivation of the Muslim Roma community in the country may put some of their members at risk of radicalisation; the fact that radical Islamist organisations are directing their efforts at those poorer parts of the country where inter-ethnic and inter-religious tensions are stronger; and, most relevant, how funding from organised crime allows them to challenge traditional Islamic clergy in those places and foment a radical and violent understanding of Islam.

Rushchenko’s piece is an in-depth examination of a key aspect within ideological confluence: the phenomenon of radicalisation in prisons. Here the author delivers the important reminder that some European prisons being known as ‘hotbeds of extremism’ or ‘universities of terror’ is not necessarily a new phenomenon: actually “prisons have played an instrumental role in the narratives of many radical political organisations in the twentieth century, including Irish Republicans, German Marxists and Egyptian Islamists.”

It is not a problem with simple solutions either: we are reminded that “radicalisation is a multi-faceted, continuous process influenced by various channels of communication and social actors”. And these factors change according to the group at hand and the political and historical context. What these experiences have in common is the existence of channels of communication between offenders convicted of non-ideological crimes and common criminals. And the important implications that come with these connections represent a vexed problem for European authorities that requires, as Rushchenko rightly claims, a more nuanced evaluation of the existing policy options.

The concluding piece by Paulussen and van der Wilt does also consider the potential responses to the nexus but does so from an International Law perspective, an approach which had been overlooked so far by scholars. The goal in the paper was to review the challenges and potential obstacles, but also the opportunities, associated with furthering international legal cooperation in this context; the assumption being that, because of their relationship, problems that emerge in one of the two areas may have implications for the other form of criminality.

Interestingly Paulussen and van der Wilt conclude that the main obstacles for cooperation are not the demands that come from the need to meet the traditional principles of international cooperation in criminal matters: i.e. the ‘political offence doctrine, the rule of double jeopardy and the principle of dual criminality’. What matters is that states are reluctant to extradite suspects if their fundamental human rights may be abused, due process denied or evidence obtained through torture. The authors make the essential point

that, in fighting the nexus at the international level, there are essential limits that governments must protect.

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