

THE CRIME TERROR NEXUS: AN ASSESSMENT OF THEIR FUNDAMEN- TAL DIFFERENCES

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The crime terror nexus is the phenomena in which criminal organizations and terrorist organizations overlap through the use of terror tactics and the illicit trade market. This research paper examines meticulously selected case studies to help determine whether there is a clear distinction between the two organizations. Using qualitative analysis of the selected case studies detailing terrorist and criminal activities, this thesis investigates the unique phenomenon through a variety of factors. Exploring pivotal characteristics such as motive, long-term/short-term goals, and definitions. In the analysis section there is an extensive examination of organizations such as ISIS, Taliban, Los Zetas, the Medellin Cartel, and Sendero Luminoso to determine if their involvement in criminal or terrorist activities further blur the distinction from the two. There will be three sections within the analysis. The first examines criminal entities engaging in terrorist acts, the second analyzes terrorist organizations' involvement in illicit trade, and the third analyzes alliances and transformations. Throughout the analysis of this thesis, based on the definition provided by the Department of Defense and case studies, it was found that there is not a clear distinction between the two organizations. While this thesis determined there are no clear distinctions, it is crucial to note that there are limitations to this research paper. These limitations include the lack of definition, political perspective, and the societal perspective of each organization.

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Introduction

Criminal enterprises will typically operate in the shadows to avoid being caught, while terrorist organizations will commit the most violent crimes to garner attention for their cause. Transnational criminal organizations have a history of extortion, bribery, and threats to ensure the police, government officials, and the public turn a blind eye to any illicit activity they engage in all in the name of greed. Unlike terrorists who prefer to be seen and heard by the public and the governments, they will ensure all their operations cannot be stopped or limited.

For years terrorist organizations and transnational criminal organizations were known for their independent strengths. Terrorist organizations were known for their political, religious, ideological beliefs and were notoriously known for the terror they reigned over civilians. Definitions used to describe terrorist groups would include characteristics such as, political or religious motive, a threat to civilians or the government, and the threat of violence or actual violence. While transnational criminal organizations were known for their lavish lifestyle that stemmed from illicit trade such as selling and trafficking drugs, guns, and even humans. Transnational criminal organizations would exploit the transnational market of commerce to sell and network illicit goods.

For years the distinction between these two types of organizations was clear, so much so that singers would glorify the life of a drug lord. They would glorify the money, the wealth, the killings, and organizations such as the cartel and mafia. It wasn't just artists who would paint the life of a criminal in such a glamorous manner, but also Hollywood. Hollywood has profited greatly by making shows about cartels such as *Narcos* and movies about the Italian Mafia like *The Godfather*, or shows such as *The Sopranos*. They have even profited greatly by making documentaries about terrorist attacks. However, the angle Hollywood has taken on terrorist attacks have never been meant to glorify their lifestyle, but rather to instill fear in watchers due the intense violence they would use. Despite the different narrative Hollywood

has given these two organizations, academically and in real life a debate surrounding if these two organizations have any fundamental distinctions.

In 2010, the bodies of 72 men and women were discovered in an isolated property, no reasoning behind such cruelty, just the gruesome scene. One might assume it was a terrorist attack due to their notoriety of violent acts that may result in death towards innocent civilians. However, this massacre was done by a violent transnational criminal organization known as *Los Zetas* in Mexico. This event highlights the complex and gruesome world that is engulfed in criminality and terrorism. This intricate relationship that on some basis these two institutions differ but on another is the same, is known as the *Crime Terror Nexus*. This concept explores the overlapping relationship between illicit activity employed by criminals and various forms of terror including acts of violence used by terrorist organizations. This thesis paper will examine their intricate relationship to answer the following question, Is there a clear and definitive distinction between transnational criminal organizations and terrorist organizations? Many scholars have agreed that all terrorists are criminals, but many disagree that criminals are not and should not be considered terrorists. This research paper will examine the complexity behind the crime terror nexus that creates a blur between transnational criminal organizations and terrorist organizations.

It is imperative for scholars and governments to identify the clear distinction between transnational criminal organizations and terrorist organizations. By being able to concretely separate the two types of institution, it can create a positive impact on multiple levels. For starters distinguishing the crime terror nexus, can further help in the legal aspect when prosecuting terrorists and criminals alike, it would ensure a just trial. In the case in which scholars and the government conclude that terrorist and transnational criminal organizations are not different but rather the same, having this conclusion drawn can help create laws and policies in place. Finding clarity in such a complex issue, would also benefit governments that are focused on preventing terrorism. Countries like the United States, work tirelessly to ensure

another tragic event such as 9/11 never occurs again. By being able to clearly dissect the intricate relationship between both organizations, will not only help prevent terrorist attack but it can also help reduce the copious amount of drugs being smuggled in and out of the United States.

Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to examine published work regarding the differences between organized crime and terrorist organizations. This literature review is not merely a summary of what each researcher has concluded about transnational criminal organizations and terrorist organizations. Rather, it analyzes the overlapping relationship between the two organizations, also known as the Crime Terror Nexus. When the two organizations overlap, it is essential to classify them and correctly label each organization with the corresponding title. This literature review is separated into three different schools of thought all claiming that there is or there is not a definitive dissension between the two groups. The first section of this literature review will consist of previous research that concluded the difference between the two groups. This portion will include differences regarding target, reason, and level of violence to further support their conclusion. The second section of this paper consists of research indicating that the two organizations have blurred lines, furthermore, proving that there is no clear distinction between the groups. These researchers focus on the overlapping use of terror tactics and illicit trade between the two, further supporting their conclusion. The concluding section of this literature review will delve into the gray areas of the two, such as perception and definition through state or country perspectives.

Clear Distinctions Between Criminal Organizations and Terrorist Groups.

The first camp presented in this literature review focuses on the clear distinctive areas between transnational criminal organizations and terrorist organizations. The research used for this section is relevant to the topic, it argues that neither of these groups can be labeled as the other

due to clear differences. It is important to break down this section due to the phenomena of the “Crime Terror Nexus” or “Narco-Terror” that suggest the lines between the two groups are too blurred and can be grouped as one organization. While the majority of these researchers do not deny that certain cases pertaining to either criminal or terrorist groups are too blurred to distinguish, they argue that each case when analyzed the distinctions are clear as day.

The motive behind an attack, whether it originates from a transnational criminal organization or a terrorist organization, can assist in identifying which type of organization it came from. For example, a fundamental motive terrorist organizations can be centered on could be political motives, ideologies, or religion. (Disley, Weed, et al., 2011) The use of Terror Tactics is not ignored or dismissed, through an objective lens, when terror attacks occur the motive draws a clear distinction. This can be seen in prominent databases that gather information regarding all terrorist groups, however, these databases will not include transnational criminal organizations such as the Medellin Cartel or Los Zetas Cartel despite their use of terror tactics. (Phillips, 2018) The author argues that they are not found in these databases due to the fundamental difference regarding motive. Unlike terrorist organizations, criminal groups when using terror tactics often use it as a warning to rival gangs or to pin the attack on their rival. Furthermore, reinforcing their argument by strengthening their contrast despite any similarities that may be presented. Another factor that further establishes the divide between the two groups is the spotlight. It is well known that terrorist organizations actively pursue media attention to further their ideology or political motives. The use of media for terrorist organizations allows them to spread not only their ideology but to also instill fear to their targets. However most transnational criminal organizations tend to operate in the shadows to increase their economic revenue for a prolonged period of time. (Matthies, Treverton, et al., 2009).

Researchers have also indicated that the target of these attacks can further distinguish the two organizations. Given the absence of a clear and

definitive definition of terrorism the target can become part of the blurred lines. Regardless of a set definition, many researchers have collectively included non-combat targets, typically in masses, as popular targets for terrorist groups. (Hodgson, Tadros, 2013) This researcher emphasizes the importance of this distinction not only to highlight the impact the target may have on the media but as well as the potential legal repercussions of the target. When considering the target, many articles focus on who was targeted and consider the amount of people. This further pushes the distinction between criminal activity or terrorist activity, if it is a group of civilians or one individual, can categorize the act as a hate crime or a terrorist act. (Schanzer, 2017) A hate crime is often motivated by similar factors as those found in terrorist groups. If one person throws water or even shoots another individual because of their religion, belief, or color, here in the United States this attack will be labeled as a hate crime. This can be noted in the night club shooting at a gay bar in Colorado, which was charged with bias-motivated crimes. (Alfonseca, 2023) Based on his motive, a belief central to hating individuals of a certain community and enacting a violent crime to instill fear in this community, fulfills the definition of a terrorist. This shows how not only does the target and its level of violence perpetrated will instill greater fear to the general public like terrorist groups intend to, but also plays a role in labeling the organization or individuals.

A third distinction collectively mentioned by most articles is the method used. Violent acts such as murder are not the only criminal offense that can be used by terrorist organizations. (Mullins, Wither, 2016) While the focus of this research is to establish the differences between the two organizations, they do not overlook their criminal offense. Despite shared crimes committed, it is established that terrorist groups will always resort to some method of violent attack. It is a signature for terrorist organizations to commit a violent crime, such as public beheadings, or bombs, they will use whichever method will attract more attention.

The final distinction that is commonly studied is their involvement in illicit trade,

many have argued that terrorist involvement in illicit trade only increased the already blurred distinction between both groups. Researchers in this camp have studied the criminal offense terrorist organizations have committed in order to fund their terrorist operations. However, the illicit trade market is so big and mostly used by transnational criminal organizations that finding a terrorist related crime within illicit trade would be very challenging. (Shelley, 2016) Although certain terrorist groups have engaged in illegal trade, there are multifaceted perspectives that can distinguish terrorist organizations from transnational criminal organizations. (Hesterman, 2015) Despite these areas of differences there are cases in which you can identify an entire transition from terrorist to criminal organizations.

Being able to see the transition from one group to another only enforces the argument that there is a clear and distinctive difference between the two organizations. (Burch, 2012, & Kay, 1999) While there are clear examples of terrorist groups dabbling in gun trade and or illicit drugs there is a huge distinction that is rarely considered. It has been studied that Mexican Cartels have a symbiotic relationship with the Terrorist organization Hezbollah. Hezbollah used the routes that Mexican cartels must smuggle in people, or materials for their operations. (Sheinis, 2012) Despite these articles that articulate facts together to establish that there are clear distinctions between transnational criminal organizations and terrorist group, there is another camp that argues, that there are no clear distinctions,

No Clear Distinctions Between Criminal Organizations and Terrorist Groups

The second camp in this literature review argues that the line between Criminal organizations and Criminal groups are too blurred to have a clear difference. This perspective is essential to the topic presented because it offers a unique perspective that the first camp argues against. These articles offer a different perspective and analyze similar cases and still have a different conclusion. Some researchers have considered the arguments above, however, their newfound perspective emphasizes why there is no clear

distinction between both groups. These articles emphasize “Narco-Terror” and the “Crime Terror Nexus” to further argue that terrorism and criminal organizations are no longer separate entities, which is why there is no clear distinction.

Criminal Organizations similar to Terrorist organizations have a fluid definition, however most researchers can agree that Cartels, Mafias, and gangs are all criminal organizations. In the far more recent year, motive has increased the blurred lines between the two groups. Articles attribute the increase of terror tactics because they see a shift in motive. Researchers have indicated that despite their consistent motive having always been economic prosperity, many criminal organizations have delved into politics or have ideologies in place. An example of this is the criminal organization Primeiro Comando da Capital, that is centered in Brazil. This is a third-generation criminal group that first participated in petty theft and by the second generation began heavily participating in all areas of illicit trade. However, by the third generation they began placing a big emphasis on politics, alongside their new importance of ideology. (Fonseca, 2020) Cartels in the past have used terror tactics to coerce politicians, and influence Mexico’s politics through the use of propaganda. (Guevara, 2013) This researcher argues that unlike other transnational criminal organizations, Cartels do not hide behind the shadows, but rather seek the spotlight similar to that of terrorist organizations to pursue their agenda.

Cartel groups such as Los Zetas, or the Medellin Cartel are the main example as to why Cartels should be called Terrorist organizations. (Longmire, 2008) Researchers argue that the increasing rating of these cartels along with terror tactics, similar targets have been adapted by these transnational criminal organizations, further blurring the line between the two groups. Cartels in Mexico are a special subgroup in organized crime, the level of violence and targeted audience leaves room to compare the cartels to political terrorist groups. (Johnson, 2019). This researcher argues that the violent terrorist like tactics imitated that of state-sponsored terrorism, he uses state-sponsored terrorism to further establish the

blurred lines between the two organizations. The article focuses on cartel groups such as Los Zetas or the Knights Templar, that have shifted their violent acts towards civilians. There are cases that do not involve violent tactics or violence committed to innocents to see the blurred lines.

Illicit trade has been widely used by terrorist groups to fund their terrorist operations, it is indicated that the assimilation between the two industries is far too blurred in order to distinguish them. An example of this is the Taliban, it is known that certain Taliban members or commanders are solely focused on running heroin laboratories. (Mullins, Wither, 2016) While this article notes the differences between the two groups it also establishes that terrorists can be confused with criminals due to their participation in illegal trade. It has been established by many researchers in this camp that there are significant terrorist groups that are participating in opiate and cocaine distribution. (Piazza, 2011) Terrorist groups are not only benefitting from existing illegal activities to fund their operations, such as human smuggling, but they are also mixing licit with illicit funds. This article highlights how terrorists are laundering money through charities, and or shell companies to fund their terrorist operations. (Baradanarn, Findley, et al., 2014 & Clarke, 2018, Schmid, 2018) It was analyzed that most terrorist organizations do not need large sums of cash, further establishing that they are blurring the line between the two organizations. It is commonly seen in definitions that terrorists prioritize religion, ideology, or political motives, but in the case of the Taliban the motive had shifted towards economic stability. While these two schools of thought examine cases closely there is still a gray area regarding who labels these organizations or individuals as terrorists.

The Grey Areas in Labeling Organizations as Terrorist

The final camp in this literature review focuses on the gray areas that may limit or

encourage the public or politicians to label an organization or individual as terrorist. As briefly mentioned in the previous camps, the definitions regarding terrorism and organized crime are very

fluid, based on country, government entities, and even public opinion. The articles in this camp will further highlight the importance of using the correct label in the midst of so much flexibility, as well as show how it can affect the distinction between the two organizations.

The purpose of establishing a definition for terrorism is not only to differentiate those organizations from criminal groups but to also ensure that the politicians do not mislabel them. An example of this could be Malcom X, he was determined to fight for the liberation of black people in the United States, he was seen as a violent actor in the Civil Right movement. His threatening tone or words in fact would not make him a terrorist, despite having a political motive, a target (US), and using fear/violent threats. (Vanaik, 2002). This researcher uses examples to further emphasize the importance of labeling a group or person as a terrorist, or terrorist attack. To further examine the gray areas with politicians, the Mexican government not only called Mexico's Zapatista National Liberation Army a terrorist group but also brought up charges of terrorism, riot, and conspiracy. (Salgado, 2016) This is an example of governments framing groups such as EZLN as terrorist groups when they are political groups that have engaged in illicit trade, at worst they are insurgents. (Dishman, 2001).

Governments or Politicians can label individuals or groups as terrorists to deter their popularity with the people, or to limit the ability to enact change in politics. They also have the ability to label terrorist groups as insurgents, or simply another political party if it is beneficial to the government. This creates a gray area, not only legally but as well socially regarding clear boundaries between crime and terrorism. The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) was deemed a terrorist group for years, however when Venezuelan Presidential candidate Hugo Chavez formed a relationship with FARC created a shift in FARC's favor. (Farah, 2012) This later would lead to the United Nations resolution acknowledging FARCA as a political party. (Matanock, 2017) The gray areas such as definition, weaponized the term "terrorism" by politicians, are crucial because they can

impact the distinctions between the two groups.

Literature Review Analysis:

As seen in the literature review most scholars have not been able to determine a clear distinction between criminal organizations and terrorist organizations. The very few research regarding the crime terror nexus is fairly limited on the differences, but rather it focuses on the relationship found within these two institutions. Most researchers focus on finding the similarities and differences as best as possible. Therefore, articles such Mullins are utilized in the first camp and in the second camp. A limitation that prevents many researchers from confidently stating that there are differences between the two groups involves the absence of a universal definition for terrorism. In the first camp that defends the clear distinctions between the two groups, most articles share at least 2 of 3 commonalities. Most researchers agree that violence, motive, and target are essential to distinguishing the two groups. When acknowledging terrorist organizations' participation in illicit trade for economic gain, research emphasizes the need for money is to fund their terrorist operations. Another limitation these articles have can be seen in motive, most articles focus on political motives and barely mention ideological or religious motives. Those are the most identifiable limitations regarding the first camp

The second camp focuses on the argument showing that there are no clear distinctions between the two organizations. A limitation that is prominent is the use of Mexico based cartels to highlight the blurred lines between the two organizations. This is a limitation because cartels are not the only famous transnational criminal organizations, but also because it is clearly emphasized that cartel groups are different from other criminal organizations. Unlike other criminal organizations, cartels are the few who excessively use terror tactics on innocent civilians. While it diminishes the argument presented in the first camp that argues criminal organizations prefer to hide in the shadows, it presents a one-sided perspective solely tied to transnational criminal organizations. These researchers' emphasize the

lack of distinction between the two groups by listing different terrorist organizations that have participated in illicit trade beyond just gathering funds for their operations. This is accredited to the absence of a stable definition of terrorism, the fluctuation of this debate is due to the various forms terrorism is defined on a country basis.

Based on the articles mentioned in the third camp, it establishes the importance of definitions which is why various cases will be analyzed by the definitions of terrorism as well as transnational criminal organizations. Throughout the literature review the definitions have been questioned to fit each author's argument, or condensing the definition based on multiple similarities between institutions. The third camp also focuses on the influential power governments and politicians have when deciding to villainize a group or individual by weaponizing the term terrorism. They can label whoever is a threat to their government or political agenda because there is no universal definition for terrorism. A limitation that some articles have is their inability to correctly label terrorist groups based on definitions as well as labeling groups "terrorist groups" to villainize them.

Overall, the goal of this literature review is to explore the three distinct perspectives that are the crime terror nexus and its distinctions. This literature review highlights the challenges in defining and distinguishing criminal organizations and terrorist organizations, through motives, tactics, and other contextual influences in the three camps.

Methodology

The research question this thesis is focused on answering is, is there a clear and definitive distinction between transnational criminal organizations and terrorist groups? This thesis question involves two globally notorious organizations with high levels of danger. As a result, this thesis is centered around data meticulously collected using qualitative analysis. The main objective of this research paper is to discover if there is a clear and definitive distinction between two organizations by using a series of case studies. This paper is centered around three

categories with 6 different organizations that all participate in the crime terror nexus. The three categories that were studied in this research paper are, transnational criminal organizations that participate in terrorist acts, terrorist organizations that participate in illicit activity, and finally a full transformation from one organization to the other. It is also critical to keep in mind that definitions and characteristics surrounding the various definitions of terrorism will be pointed out throughout the entire research paper.

This section of this methodology will focus on the importance of the definitions as well as which two definitions will be used throughout the thesis. The first that will be used is the definition provided by the United Nations. This definition was chosen for this thesis because the United Nations Security Council, which is made up of 15 members from a variety of countries, agreed it was the most fitting definition. The second definition that was chosen for this paper is from the Department of Defense it was chosen due to the United States unwavering efforts on their fight against terrorism. While there are 3 separate sections in this research paper, it is imperative to remember that each organization will be used for comparison in other sections. Certain characteristics such as goals, tactics, and motive will be used throughout the entire paper in the sections pertaining to terror tactics embedded in transnational criminal organizations and illicit activity found in terrorist organizations.

The first category will be centered on transnational criminal organizations, that mainly focus on two powerful cartels in two separate countries. The first transnational criminal organization is based out of Mexico known as Los Zetas Cartel. The second criminal organization is the Medellin Cartel led by Pablo Escobar in Columbia. These cartels were chosen as case studies for this research paper due to their unapologetic use of violence, coercion, and their notorious reputations. Los Zetas, currently one of the deadliest transnational criminal organizations in Mexico, is known for its recent violent messages, planned attacks, and ongoing brutal activities. This transnational criminal organization was selected not only

because of their violent reputation but also due to alleged ties that connect Los Zetas to terrorist syndicates that will later be touched on. This case was selected due to their recruitment of former military men and their alleged alliance with certain terrorist groups. Due to the nature of this paper, all data was collected through scholarly articles centered around the crime terror nexus or the power Los Zetas have over Mexico.

In the analysis section, this paper will examine a few examples of such violence and methods of persuasion under the lenses of terrorism. It will also help determine if the line between terrorist and criminal syndicate has blurred too much to see a clear distinction or if it draws a clearer line. The Medellin Cartel under the control of Pablo Escobar was fairly violent as well as being power hungry which led to his interest in politics. This section will strictly focus on violent atrocities each transnational criminal organization committed that may resemble terrorist action, while comparing motive, target, and if it indeed blurs the line between the two.

The second category consists of well-known terrorist organizations, which include ISIS, and the Taliban. Remember in this section, this thesis will not cover any topics regarding the politicization of terrorist groups or the politicization of the term terrorist. These were all meticulously selected case studies due to their notoriety in the past and even now. All were chosen due to their societal notoriety due to heinous acts they have committed or their alleged ties with criminals.

ISIS is fundamental to this paper and will be used as a key to showcase various methods known as “terror tactics.” It is imperative to use ISIS as a background for violence that has also been perpetuated by criminal organizations. This will better investigate if there is a difference between two organizations that commit the same heinous act. ISIS will also be used to showcase the various forms of funding through the illicit market. Similar to ISIS, the Taliban is known for becoming involved in the same illicit trade as many transnational criminal organizations. The organization mentioned above will be used to compare to independent organizations that have overlapped so much

in recent years that have created a new debate if there even is a fundamental difference.

Finally, the last section that this paper will touch on is the alliance and the cases in which we have seen a full transition from one type of organization to the other. In this section the selected case study includes Sendero Luminoso from Peru also known as the Shining Path. Sendero Luminoso was chosen for this case analysis due to the stages it underwent over the years of their reign. This section will also introduce the alliances that have been connected between transnational criminal organizations and terrorist groups, these alliances include Los Zetas and Hezbollah. The cases above were chosen because of the importance that will give a different perspective without the intricacies of a definition.

Analysis

This section of the research paper will analyze various factors that will help determine if there is a clear distinction between transnational criminal organizations and terrorist organizations. In order to conclude whether there is a clear distinction between transnational criminal organizations and terrorist organizations it is imperative to know what they exactly are. Transnational criminal organizations are, “self-perpetuating associations of individuals who operate transnationally for the purpose of obtaining power, influence, monetary and/or commercial gains, wholly or in part by illegal means, while protecting their activities through a pattern of corruption and/or violence or while protecting their illegal activities through a transnational organization structure and the exploitation of transnational commerce or communications mechanism.” (National Security Council, 2008). While the definition of transnational criminal organization is very clear and concise the same cannot be said for terrorism. When defining terrorisms there are various factors that involve a plethora of definitions of terrorism, the characteristics that make up those definitions. Followed by case studies that will help draw distinctions and similarities between the two organizations. Note that in this thesis paper, the definitions of both organizations will be used throughout the paper to help examine

the case studies. This will further help conclude if there is or if there is not a clear and definitive distinction between the two organizations.

Unfortunately, no one institution shares the same definition of terrorism, while many share many similar factors there are small factors that can blur the lines between criminal and terrorist organizations. The first definition is from the Department of Defense gives the definition of international terrorist as, "The unlawful use of violence or threat of violence, often motivated by religious, political, or other ideological beliefs, to instill fear and coerce governments or societies in pursuit of goals that are usually political" (Department of Defense, n.d., p.242) The second definition that will be used to analyze each case is the United Nations definition. Based on their Resolution 1566 from 2004, they stated, "criminal acts, including against civilians, committed with the intent to cause death or serious bodily injury, or taking of hostages, with the purpose to provoke a state of terror in the general public or in a group of persons or particular persons, intimidate a population or compel a government or an international organization to do or to abstain from doing any act." (United Nations, n.d., Resolution 1566) While both institutions share similarities, they also share vast differences in which can make the biggest distinctions. A few similarities the Department of Defense and the United Nations definition share is the idea that it must be a threat, criminal or violent act. However, the Department of Defense is the only one to require the act to have the intent to kill or cause bodily harm. Another similarity they share is the goal to instill fear or terror in the general public or government, with the goal to stop a government from doing a specific act. While there are similarities in their definitions there are a few fundamental differences that can make a vast difference when it comes to the Crime Terror Nexus.

The first fundamental difference is the motive, the department of defense indicated that the motive must be religious, political, or ideological beliefs, while the United Nations does not specify the motive. The second fundamental difference is the goal, while both definitions include deterring

the government, the department of defense definitions includes; "pursuit of goals that are usually political" (Department of Defense, n.d., p.242) . While the UN merely mentions to intimidate a government or organization to not do any act, the end goal does not have to be purely political or for ideological pursuits. The two clear distinctions that are used to analyze each case will be goal and motive. Due to the unwavering attempts of the United States to stop terror this thesis will focus on the definition rendered by the Department of Defense.

To further dissect the definition of the Department of Justice, this paper will focus on the following requirements: level of violence, the goal/motive, and their target. The motive according to the Department of Defense has to be political, religious, or ideological, while criminal organizations are typically motivated by monetary gain, cartel organizations such as Los Zetas have committed atrocities to impact political policies, or political elections. This brings the next characteristic that will be used to examine if there is a clear fundamental difference between transnational criminal organizations and terrorist organizations. According to the Department of Defense all operations of terrorist organizations are typically in pursuit of political goals, however this does not clearly indicate that their long-term goal had to be political. Criminal organizations have placed attacks on the government or its civilians in order to influence policies, and elections. This thesis will investigate the use of violence, motive, and goals, in an attempt to find out where there is a clear distinction between both organizations. The following section will analyze Transnational criminal organizations and their engagement in terrorist activities.

Criminal Organizations Engaging in Terrorist Acts.

In this section the paper will analyze the crime terror nexus through the lenses of transnational criminal organizations and its overlapping relationship with terrorism to help indicate if there is a fundamental difference or if the lines have blurred far too much. The first case that will be examined is the hanging of 9 decapitated men

who are believed to be part of the Gulf Cartel. (The Guardian, 2012) This terrorizing tactic was done by no other than Los Zetas, a transnational criminal organization notoriously known for their use of violence in order to coerce or instill fear in the general public and government officials. This level of violence can be seen done by other terrorist organizations, especially in an attempt to terrorize a large group of civilians or governments. In 2004 Nicholas Berg, an American citizen, was caught by ISIS, a well-known terrorist organization. ISIS unfortunately decapitated Nicholas Berg but also videotaped this heinous act of violence and distributed the video online to terrorize American civilians and the American government. ISIS used Nicholas Berg as revenge for the mistreatment of Iraqi prisoners in the hands of U.S. soldiers in Abu Ghraib, leaving a clear message to the U.S. government to tread carefully. (Filkins, 2004) Similar to ISIS, Los Zetas used the decapitated bodies to instill fear in the civilians of Nuevo Laredo but as well as any government employee. Their message was loud and clear, if any civilian or corrupt cop helped any member of the Gulf Cartel they too would be captured, killed, and left in public as a display. This is not the first or last use of terror tactics Los Zetas Cartel has used in order to achieve their goals.

Based on the definition provided by the Department of Defense both atrocities mentioned above would be classified as terrorist organizations. The first requirement of the threat or use of violence is evident, we also have to examine their motive, during this time Los Zetas had an ongoing turf war with the Gulf Cartel. In this case the goal and motive were to ensure that civilians and government employees such as the police would not help any member of the Gulf Cartel. This can be argued that the use of this terror tactic was to coerce the government and society to turn a blind eye to any help or bribes the Gulf Cartel may have. The goal for the Zetas in this case was territory that they wanted control of. This thesis argues that their use of violence to obtain control of this terrorist is political to ensure the government does not attempt to stop Los Zetas illicit activity. It can also be argued that

it is not enough of a political reason because their long-term goal is not political power. However, nowhere in the definition does it specify that their “political pursuit” must be long term, the definition also states that their violent acts or threats of violent act is, “in pursuit of goals that are usually political” (Department of Defense, n.d., p.242) .Therefore this thesis paper argues that a political purist is not required, the use of the word “usually” can indicate that there are other reasons as to why a terrorist group would coerce or instill fear into the government therefore making the political goal unnecessary.

The following case that will be examined is the Medellin Cartel led by the Kingpin Pablo Escobar. This criminal organization has been connected or committed a series of events that can be classified as terrorism. In the late 80's and early 90's Pablo Escobar did a series of attacks on the Colombian government. The deadliest attack the Medellin Cartel did was in 1989, in which they set off a bomb in a, “commercial jet, Avianca Flight 203, which killed 110 people.” (Phillips, 2018, p.53) This attack was meant to coerce the Colombian government to stop the attacks and the intelligence placed on the capturing of Pablo Escobar and their attempts at destroying the Medellin Cartel. Pablo Escobar not only used violence, had a political motive, and ultimately such actions were in pursuit of a political goal. While the bombing of Avianca Flight 203 was driven by the Medellin Cartel's agenda which was to protect their illicit business ventures, it was undeniably political as well. The bombing of this jet had one target, a Presidential Candidate that was anti-drugs and his goal was to dismantle cartels. In an attempt to assassinate a presidential candidate, Caesar Gallardo, Pablo Escobar's goal was to use his power and ability to influence Columbia's presidential election.

In comparing this attack to that of the definition of terrorism provided by the Department of Defense, the Medellin Cartel and Pablo Escobar would be rendered terrorist. Analyzing this attack from the level of violence, motive, and goal, may provide evidence indicating that the line between terrorist and criminal organizations have blurred far too much to see a clear difference. The level

of violence resulted in the death of 110 civilians, per the definition of the Department of Defense this attack checks off the first requirements. The motive for bombing a plane was political, it was an attempt on altering a presidential election, an attempt to coerce the government or future governments heads to enact policies that would affect Pablo Escobar's goals.

The goal in this case was political, not only because Pablo Escobar wanted to protect this business endeavors but for another reason, political power. In the early 1980's the king of cocaine, Pablo Escobar had expressed his desire to run for president for Colombia. The case study of the Medellin Cartel and its leader Pablo Escobar indicates the complex and unique phenomena that causes the crime terror nexus to blur far too much to see a clear distinction. In 1983 six years prior to the attack of Flight 203 Pablo Escobar managed to, "win a seat in the house of representative." (Rubio, 2016, p.76) Focusing on the political ambitions Pablo Escobar had for himself, his long term goal was to end up with the highest power in Colombia as president. If his long term goal was the presidency the creation of the Medellin Cartel was merely a tactic to pursue his short term goals, such as monetary gain and the ability to influence Colombian politics.

In this section, it analyzed two cases which allowed us to see what makes a clear difference between a transnational criminal organization and terrorist organization through the Department of Defense definitions. It also results in seeing how based on the United Nations definition, the line that distinct the two independent organizations can become so intertwined that blurs the line too much to see a clear distinction. In the following section this thesis will analyze the tactics that terrorist organizations have used in order to fund their organizations.

Terrorist Organization engaged in Criminal Activities

Just as transnational criminal organizations, terrorist organizations are involved in criminal activity that have played a huge role in blurring the lines between transnational criminal organizations and terrorist organizations. Over

the years terrorist organizations involvement in criminal activity has spread from violent acts to the black market or the drug trade. The reasoning behind their increasing involvement in illicit activities is to fund their organizations most especially their terrorist attacks. However, it can be seen that some terrorist organizations have become far too involved in the illicit market, one could argue that their religious or political motive has changed to a more monetary goal. This section will analyze this concern using two well-known terrorist organizations.

The first terrorist organization we will look into is the Taliban, while the Taliban is currently the ruling government of Afghanistan they will be recognized as a terrorist organization in this thesis. The ultimate reasoning behind categorizing the Taliban as a terrorist organization is because the United States along with other countries do not recognize the Taliban as the government of Afghanistan. This decision was also based on the history of the Taliban that is spammed with various terrorist threats, terrorist attacks, and the terror they have instilled on the people of Afghanistan in order to obtain power. When analyzing the Taliban, while they are part of a terrorist organization, they have increased their participation in illicit trade. At first the Taliban would threaten and force farmers to harvest opium poppy flowers. The Taliban also, "gets funding from taxing all aspects of drug trade. Opium harvests are taxed around 12 percent and heroin-manufacturing labs are taxed at \$70 per kilogram..." (Hesterman, 2005, p.33) The Taliban's engagement in the illicit market began with taxing, however over years they have developed. The Taliban's structured as a cell, some of these cells have become fully functioning trafficking organizations. Commanders of the Taliban have become directly involved in the drug trade by increasing production by controlling their own heroin laboratories. (Mullins, Wither, 2016)

In the case study of the Taliban, when analyzing their actions, it would be considered a transnational criminal organization. As mentioned above the criteria needed to be classified as a transnational criminal organization is, a group of individuals must operate transnationally

meaning operating in several nations, with the goal to obtain power, monetary gains, through illegal activities. (National Security Council, 2008). The Taliban's engagement in the drug trade was done for monetary gain in order to achieve their long-term goal of obtaining power. The cultivation of heroin and cocaine are clearly illegal, therefore making themselves criminals, in order to protect their business, the Taliban has ensued violence for years in order to protect their drug trafficking business. They also took part in the black market and a series of networks in order to sell the heroin and cocaine that their cells have cultivated or gathered. When analyzing the Taliban through the lens of Transnational Criminal Organizations definition it would appear the line has indeed blurred far too much. Similar to the Taliban, ISIS, a terrorist organization, also engaged in illegal trade via cyberware.

Through the sales of antiquities, oil, and in the cyber market, ISIS has utilized the black market as their personal bank in order to obtain funding for their operations. They're increasing activity along the black market has become a huge part of their organization since 2014, beginning with the sale of illicit antiquities. Government intelligence has stated, "Iraqi Intelligence services revealed in June 2014 that the group made as much as US\$36 million from the sales of antiquities." (Blannin, 2018, p. 16). ISIS obtains these antiquities via looting museums, and libraries throughout Iraq and Syria. They have also gained control of at least 4,500 archeological cultural sites in which the vast majority of these valuable antiquities are stolen by ISIS and then smuggled to be sold overseas through the black market. (Terrill, 2017) Antiquities are not the only product they sell via the black market, they also sell oil.

With the high demand of oil, ISIS has begun selling illegally obtained oil in various nations and using the black market to sell the oil for profit. This organization has profited greatly from their illegal sale of oil, " they earned US \$70-200 million annually from oil smuggling..." (Blannin, 2018, p.14). In order to obtain the oil ISIS has illegally transported, they have attacked oil infrastructure throughout the middle east, mainly attacking Libya, Iraq, Egypt, and

Syria. (Blannin, 2018). ISIS has found a way to exploit the transnational market of commerce in order to sell oil. They have control of small oil refineries which sell oil to outside agents that then transport the oil to be resold in legitimate markets. (Blannin, 2018). The exploitation and corrupted schemes in which ISIS partakes in, clearly fulfills a characteristic that is needed to be labeled a transnational criminal organization.

ISIS has also created quite a reputation of illicit activity via the internet from hackers for hire, to cyber-jacking. ISIS has created their own online marketplace in which they supply, "cybercrime tools such as malware and ransomware, as well as for skilled hackers, who can be hired for criminal services." (Terrill, 2017, p.19) Not only are they committing crimes, but it has also become a nationwide organization. Since this type of illegal online activity can be executed from anywhere in the world, ISIS cyber market has networks and connections all over the world, remarkably similar to the network's cartels have created in order to transfer product or information. British intelligence found that British ISIS supporters have a revenue of about \$1.8 million US through a large-scale fraud scheme. (Terrill, 2017) ISIS just like the Taliban fulfills all the requirements needed to be considered a criminal organization. ISIS has exploited the transnational market of commerce through various schemes and illegal activity in order to obtain monetary gain.

Alliances and Transitions:

This section will focus on the alliances between terrorist organizations and criminal organizations. The alliances and full transformations can be clear indicators that there is a clear difference between the two organizations. Considering that an alliance is needed in order to obtain each other's goals would prove that, due to their knowledge in each domain it can show the substantive difference between the two organizations. A different perspective that alliances and transformation play a part in the crime terror nexus. As we know the crime terror nexus is the overlapping relationship between the two organizations, however it can also be seen as a transformation process. The process of starting as either an

alliance which will be tackled in this portion of the paper. The alliance is the first step towards a full transition, this will be shown with Sendero Luminoso an insurgent terrorist group turned criminal. While a strict alliance can also be placed such as the alliance between Hezbollah a terrorist group and Los Zetas a criminal group.

An alliance born between Hezbollah, a terrorist organization based out of Lebanon and Cartel group Los Zetas based out of Mexico, will be the first case that is analyzed in this portion of the thesis. Due to the ideology and beliefs that are carried on by Hezbollah they have created an alliance with a criminal organization to smuggle “necessity” into the United States for a Shia dominated world. In order to save money, resources and time, Hezbollah created an alliance with Los Zetas to have weapons, money, and members of their organization to be smuggled into the United States. (Sheinis, 2012) This alliance is a functioning symbiotic relationship for both parties, Hezbollah can focus on their organization and operations without having to become too involved in illicit trade and the Cartels not only make a pretty penny but also increase their smuggling operations. In this instance, the alliance between both organizations can be clearly distinguished as two separate institutions. Despite the alliances Hezbollah has created with the criminal cartels for their smuggling operations, they also have also used the illicit market to fund their organization. Hezbollah uses cells that have integrated themselves in illicit trade, which would be the next step after the alliance. It is their appropriation of criminal organizations, Hezbollah has, “worldwide crime operations extending from South America, through African Europe..... Cells are primarily involved in trading heroin and cocaine, but also facilitating money laundering...” (Nacos, 2019, p. 228). While Hezbollah went through the first two stages of the crime terror nexus through this perspective, they have not fully transformed.

In the section above, this thesis discussed the first part of the crime terror nexus which is the alliance and the appropriation of another type of organization, in this case a criminal organization. The following is the complete transformation,

in which the terrorist organization has lost their perspective within the illegal market. That terrorist and criminal groups have orchestrated in order to obtain monetary gain or become closer to their target. There are instances in which the alliance can shift and lead to an organization from appropriating the other or shifting completely into the other. Sendero Luminoso also known as the Shining Path is based out of Peru they began with alliance that shifted and leading their organization to be dissolved and another evolving to another. Sendero Luminoso, began as an insurgent group fighting against their government demanding change. In order to obtain cash flow to fund their operations, the case of Sendero Luminoso they created an alliance with “King Coca “. This King Coca was a well known cocaine cultivator and seller within Peru. With this alliance Sendero Luminoso was able to receive more funding for their organization and planned operations against the communist government of Peru. (Kay, 1998) While their alliance with King Coca first began as Sendero Luminoso began as protectors of the coca fields from other groups attempting to eradicate the field, they soon became more ingrained in this drug trafficking operation. After the inevitable fall of King Coca, “Sendero Luminoso has been able to strengthen its ties with the drug cartel from the past decade...” (Burch, 2012, p.8)

When Alberto Fujimori became President of Peru, he enacted various policies and strategies to not only eliminate King Coca, but as well as the downfall of Sendero Luminoso. In order to do this, policies that would crack down on the cultivation of cocaine became heavily implemented to dismantle King Coca. After their alliance fell through with King Coca, their access to copious amounts of money ended, which resulted in Sendero Luminoso to appropriate these traffickers and start cultivating and selling themselves. Their goal up until this point was to gain access to large amounts of money in order to fund their terrorist tactics, and operations. However after the capturing of their Leader Abimael Guzman in 1992, Sendero Luminoso began to dissolve, leaving the remaining members and organization to, “be arguably described not

as a rebel group, but as a violent organization.” (Burch, 2012, p.8) This demonstrates a clear distinction between two organizations when you see them organically change, however you simultaneously identify the gray areas of each case.

Limitations:

This thesis was based on qualitative analysis of meticulously selected case studies, but also a carefully selected definition. However, it is important to note that there are a few limitations to this thesis which include definitions, political and societal perspectives. In this thesis there was only one definition used to help determine if the lines between Transnational criminal organizations and terrorist organizations have blurred far too much to even see a distinction between the two. It is imperative to understand that there is no universal definition of terrorism, because of this the conclusion this paper has reached can be different based on the definition used. Other definitions require a few different characteristics that can change the outcome when comparing it to these cases. It is also important to note that no criminal organization is structured the same way, has the same level of violence, or goals.

The political perspective which was not used in this thesis paper can also impact the conclusion of this paper. The politicization of the word “terrorism” has become a tool governments or politicians have used and still continue to use in order to remove credibility from legitimate insurgent/rebel groups. When you weaponize a word like terrorism and describe a legitimate group of people who want to instill change not only removes credibility, but also support from the general public and other governments. An example of this can be seen when the Mexican government not only called Mexico’s Zapatista National Liberation Army a terrorist group but also brought up charges of terrorism, riot, and conspiracy. (Salgado, 2016) This was done to remove any credibility of their reservations against the government. Governments will also label criminal organizations as terrorists in order to create more panic amongst civilians to remove any possible support they may have from the public. This public support can be

seen in the case of the Knights Templars which is a criminal organization that has helped civilians through building schools or medical centers in the regions they control. Despite the violence they have enacted on civilians, they have also helped the community which can affect the support system surrounding their organizations. The social perspective also has an enormous impact on whether there is a clear distinction between transnational criminal organizations and terrorist organizations.

Here in the United States, when we see the violence cartel and other criminal organizations have forced civilians to endure, it allows the west to view them as terrorists. However, individuals from third world countries such as Columbia or Mexico may not consider them terrorists because the violence present in their country has become the social norm. It is also important to note that societal circumstances also play a huge role in how individuals view criminals and terrorists. In the United States we have what people call “the American Dream”. This notion is that if you come here to the states, work hard, get an education, at the end of the road you’ll have a stable income, own a home, and provide for your family. This dream extends to not only immigrants but to Americans living in poverty. America provides free education from kindergarten to twelfth grade. The US government facilitates individuals with low income to attend college via FAFSA or the Dream Act to increase college education. However, in countries such as Mexico or Columbia where the government does not even provide free k-12 education, the life of crime can be seen as the only option out of poverty.

Conclusion

Based on the in-depth analysis, regarding the crime terror nexus, this thesis concludes that there is not a clear distinction between transnational criminal organizations and terrorist organizations. The factors that have contributed to this conclusion consist of the meticulously chosen case studies from both terrorist and transnational criminal organizations, and the definition of terrorism. As mentioned in the section regarding limitations it is important to

understand that the conclusion reached in this paper is based on a single definition of Terrorism not a collection of definitions. Based on the cases selected along with the definition used, there is not a clear distinction between the two organizations, however this conclusion could be challenged because not all cases are the same.

The definition this research paper used per the Department of Defense would consider the Los Zetas and the Medellin Cartel terrorist organizations not just a criminal organization. In the case of Los Zetas, the category they have fulfilled was the level of violence they have exhibited as a warning not only to civilians but to government employees. While the argument that their political motive was not sufficient enough for them to be considered terrorist organizations like the Taliban, this is where lack of definition further complicates the crime terror nexus. In the case of Los Zetas this thesis argued that their actions did not have to be done in pursuit of a political goal based on the word choices that were elected. It is important to understand that the cartel group Los Zetas is no longer operating in the shadows like older, traditional criminal organizations. They are continuously threatening and committing acts of violence against civilians in order to terrorize and instill fear.

On the other hand the Medellin Cartel and Pablo Escobar did fulfill all the requirements needed to be considered a terrorist group without having to dissect or interpret the word choices. Seeing that Pablo Escobar had expressed his desire to run for president of Colombia, the Medellin Cartel being an extension of him would also classify as a terrorist organization. The bombing on flight 203 is merely one example of Pablo Escobar, attempting to persuade and influence presidential elections and policies. The level of violence perpetrated by Pablo Escobar and his cartel has far surpassed criminal activities and have entered the realm of terrorism. Despite the terroristic attacks, Pablo Escobar and the cartel have exposed the people of Columbia to due to their drug trading efforts they are still categorized as a criminal organization. However, the thesis analyzed and explained why it would and should be considered

a terrorist organization due to the overwhelming amount of definitions surrounding terrorism, others could argue. It should only be labeled as a criminal organization. Issues with the definition like the one we see with Los Zetas cartel, is the main issue why it is imperative for governments and scholars to not only set a universal definition of terrorism but also really find the differences.

Criminals using terror tactics and their questionable political motives are not the only organization at fault as to why there is not a clear distinction between the two groups. Terrorist organizations such as ISIS and the Taliban have lost part of their identity and motive to the exploitation of the commercial market. As analyzed in this thesis, using the definition of Transnational Criminal Organizations both would be labeled as such. The Taliban had cells in which commanders would create heroin laboratories in order to be more hands on in their drug trading efforts. What was once a small operation in order to fund their terrorist operations has gotten lost over the years. Due to their growing operations in the heroin and cocaine business, it is harder to identify if they are merely doing this for the funding of operations or if their motive has shifted and is primarily focused on monetary gain. ISIS not only has increased operations in one illicit trademark, but in a variety of different sections. They have various streams of income stemming from oil smuggling, the selling of antiques that were gathered illegally, but as well as in the cyber market. They have exploited transnational commercial markets in multiple nations from multiple members. For members that are based out in different nations, it is harder to dictate if monetary gain is still for the political and ideological beliefs Isis holds or if it is for personal monetary gain.

When analyzing the alliances and the transformations from one group to another type of group, we see clear differences, but we also see the gray areas that make the crime terror nexus far more intricate. We saw the clear differences between Hezbollah, a terrorist organization and Los Zetas, a criminal organization, based on the symbiotic relationship they have formed over years. This was shown when Hezbollah had

and continues to use the cartel to smuggle guns, members, and money into the United States in order for them to pursue their operations. In return, they pay the cartel a large sum for their expertise and networking opportunities they do not have. However, we also see that Hezbollah has their own operations within the illicit world of drug and human trafficking. At this stage the thesis was interpreted to be the appropriation of a criminal group. While there are still some differences based on the motive that they are using the money from the drug operations to pay the cartel to advance their operations. It does not help the argument that there are clear distinctions. Rather, it creates a murky area that can only be interpreted that terrorist organizations and transnational criminal organizations are no different than one another.

However, we can't see the clear distinction between the Sendero Luminoso, an Insurgent terrorist organization that began as a way to fight the communist Peruvian government. In the case of Sendero Luminosos , we see a full transition from an insurgent/terrorist organization to a full-blown drug cartel. While it underwent the same stage of appropriation of a criminal group like Hezbollah underwent they completed the transition. Despite their alliance with King Coca and their brief dabble in the illicit market under King Coca, the group completely dissolved. After the capture of king Coca, the organization began to weaken, which is when the level of appropriation began to increase, they began to plant the coca flower and sell the cocaine that they cultivated. When their leader was captured in 1992, Sendero Lumunso dissolved, in turn the majority of its members left the organization. While the remaining members simply became a cartel group continuing to profit off the Coca plants to cultivate and sell cocaine.

With all the information that was analyzed in the thesis, there is not a clear distinction between the two organizations. While there is an academic debate between the difference between the two until there is a universal definition of terrorism, a case by case analysis, the answer will always fluctuate. In the case selected in the thesis prove that there is not a clear distinction

based on the one definition that was chosen.

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