



The Crime-Terror Nexus in Spain and Portugal

- The objective of this working paper is to present an overview of links between crime and terrorism (the crime-terror nexus) in Spain and Portugal, highlight potential risks, and make a series of recommendations for how such risks can be mitigated.
 - It is part of a Europe-wide survey that will produce similar papers for all 28 member states of the European Union. In doing so, the aim is to generate a more holistic understanding of threats from crime and terrorism, and promote new and innovative ways of tackling them.
 - Though illicit activities are notoriously difficult to measure, the presence of links between crime and terrorism can be seen among jihadists in Spain, who have routinely engaged in “regular” criminality for the purposes of terrorism.
 - It remains important for both countries to be alert to the potential use of existing illicit criminal networks by terrorist groups, especially as a means of trafficking arms and people.
 - Our recommendations include action on prisons, terrorist financing, information sharing, and collaboration between security agencies as well as between government and non-government actors.
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1 Introduction

Spain has long suffered from terrorism. In the latter half of the 20th century, the country was the target of a deadly campaign of violence by the Basque separatist group ETA (*Euskadi Ta Askatasuna*, or Basque Homeland and Liberty), which saw a wave of sustained bombings, assassinations and kidnappings. In the past two decades the jihadist threat has assumed priority, with the country experiencing one of the deadliest terrorist attacks in European history on 11th March 2004, when al-Qaeda terrorists blew up commuter trains in Madrid. Today, the jihadist threat remains significant, and often has a “regular” criminal connection, with perpetrators either having criminal pasts or engaging in criminality for the purpose of extremism.

The objective of this paper is to present an overview of links between crime and terrorism in Spain and Portugal, highlight potential risks, and make a series of recommendations for how such risks can be mitigated. It is part of a Europe-wide survey that will produce similar papers for all 28 member states of the European Union. In doing so, the aim is to generate a more holistic understanding of threats from crime and terrorism, and promote new and innovative ways of tackling them.

The paper’s empirical basis is a survey of open sources, including relevant government and inter-governmental reports, academic research, court documents, and newspaper articles. The research took place between October and November 2018, and was carried out by a team of Spanish, Portuguese, and British researchers.¹

Though illicit activities are notoriously difficult to measure, the presence of links between crime and terrorism can be seen among jihadists in Spain, who have routinely engaged in “regular” criminality for the purposes of terrorism.

The paper starts with an overview of organised crime in Spain and Portugal. In the second part, we explore the terrorist scene in both countries, noting the areas in which links to crime have emerged. The paper concludes with a series of recommendations for policymakers, security agencies, and society as a whole.

¹ The authors of this report are Peter R. Neumann and Rajan Basra. We wish to thank Fernando Ageo Damas and Claudia Carvalho for their research support. We are also grateful to all interviewees, whether named or anonymous.

Box 1: What is the Crime-Terror Nexus?

The concept of the crime-terror nexus emerged in the early 1990s, following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of globalisation. Amidst shifting geopolitics and the birth of the information age, analysts noticed that terrorist and insurgent groups were increasingly adapting criminal modus operandi to further their aims.

Since then, scholars have identified *three types of crime-terror nexus: institutional, organisational, and social.*

Institutional

One of the pioneers was Tamara Makarenko.² On her “crime-terror continuum”, she identified three types of institutional linkages between criminal and terrorist groups:

- At one end, criminal and terrorist groups engaged in *co-operation*, either in limited, transaction-based alliances, or in more sophisticated coalitions.
- Nearing the middle, *convergence* indicated when groups adapted skills belonging to the other, resulting in “hybrid criminal-terrorist groups”.
- At the other end was *transformation*, in which a group had completely transformed into the other by way of a shift in motivation.

Among the most prominent examples have been the Taliban, which have at times depended on Afghanistan’s heroin production; the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces’ (FARC) involvement in their country’s narcotics industry; and the smuggling of petrol and counterfeit goods by the Irish Republican Army (IRA).

Organisational

Writing at the same time as Makarenko, Letizia Paoli focused on the structural and organisational similarities between youth gangs and terrorist groups, which she categorised as “clannish” organisations:³

- They were involved in illegal activity, including violence;
- They required members’ “absolute commitment”;
- They offered *emotional benefits*, such as status, “brotherhood”, identity, and belonging.

continues...

² Tamara Makarenko, “The Crime-Terror Continuum: Tracing the Interplay between Transnational Organised Crime and Terrorism”, *Global Crime*, Vol 6, No 1, 2004, pp.129-145.

³ Letizia Paoli, “The Paradoxes of Organized Crime”, *Crime, Law, and Social Change*, Vol 37, No 1, 2002, pp.51-97.

In Paoli's view, drawing sharp distinctions between actors based on their stated aims – criminal versus political – could be misleading, because the distinctions might be blurred and “goals [could] change”.

As an example, she cited white supremacist gangs in the United States, which recruited their membership according to ideological principles and professed to have a political programme but were heavily involved in “ordinary” crime.

Social

In a recent study of jihadist recruitment in Europe, Rajan Basra and Peter R. Neumann highlighted not the convergence of criminals and terrorists as groups or organisations but of their social networks, environments, or milieus.⁴ Rather than formalised collaboration or even transformation, they found that criminal and terrorist groups recruited from sociologically similar pools of people, creating (often unintended) synergies and overlaps.

This “new” crime-terror nexus had four facets:

- It affected processes of *radicalisation*, because involvement in terrorism could offer redemption and legitimise crime.
- It highlighted the *role of prisons* as environments for radicalisation and networking among criminals and extremists.
- It emphasised the *development of skills and experiences* that could be useful for terrorists, particularly access to weapons, forged documents, and the familiarity with violence.
- It facilitated the *financing* of terrorism, especially through petty crime.

Despite differences in approach and perspective, the *three types of nexus – institutional, organisational, and social* – are not mutually exclusive. Taken together, they provide the analytical framework of the Crime Terror Nexus Project.

⁴ Rajan Basra and Peter R. Neumann, “Criminal Pasts, Terrorist Futures: European Jihadists and the New Crime-Terror Nexus”, *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol 10, No 6, 2016, pp.25-40.

2 Organised crime

Organised criminals have made a home in the Iberian Peninsula, which has served as a gateway for illicit trade into Europe, for centuries. The geography of Spain and Portugal has played an important role: sitting on the southern tip of Europe with long coastlines and large territorial waters, both countries are natural transit points for drugs coming from North Africa, South America, and Lusophone Africa.⁵

Today, organised crime has a significant presence in Spain and Portugal.⁶ This section provides an overview of the crime scene in both countries, focusing on the groups involved, as well as their activities and locations. It shows that, mainly because of their location at the intersection of multiple trafficking routes, Spain and Portugal have come to play a major role as hubs for illicit trafficking.

Groups

According to the most recent estimate from the Spanish authorities, 444 organised crime groups were active in the country in 2016, of which 256 were disrupted by police.⁷ The vast majority of groups (86%) in the country have a life span of less than three years.⁸ In Portugal, there are no official public estimates of the number of groups, though the authorities have disclosed that 76,600 individuals were accused of being involved in organised crime in 2017.⁹

Crime groups are markedly international in their composition. An estimated 62% of Spanish crime groups have members with more than one nationality, with only 21% of groups exclusively composed of Spanish nationals.¹⁰ Portugal has noted more than 60 nationalities operating in the country, with groups often containing citizens from South America or North Africa.¹¹

5 *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, Vol II: Money Laundering*, Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, March 2018, p.168.

6 In Spain, organised crime is defined as a group of two or more members, with a prolonged period of action, committing serious crimes in search of power or profit. In addition, the group must exhibit two of: a specific arrangement of duties; use of internal control; an international dimension; use of violence; money laundering; use of commercial and economic structures; or an abuse/corruption of public and private authorities. See CITCO, "*Informe de situación: Lucha contra el crimen organizado y la corrupción*", Ministerio de Interior, Gobierno de España, May 2017, p.2. In Portugal, there is no comprehensive legal framework addressing organised crime, though in the *Relatório Anual de Segurança Interna (RASI) 2017* report on the issue, it was defined as an association of two or more people who act together to commit a crime, independent of their degree of participation, type of crime, or specific features of the group. See *Relatório Anual de Segurança Interna (RASI) 2017*, Sistema de Segurança Interna, 2017, p.62.

7 This is of a total 444 groups that CITCO has taken action against. CITCO, *Informe de situación: Lucha contra el crimen organizado y la corrupción*, Ministerio de Interior, Gobierno de España, May 2017, pp.3-4.

8 *Ibid.*

9 *Relatório Anual de Segurança Interna (RASI) 2017*, p.64.

10 CITCO, *Informe de situación: Lucha contra el crimen organizado y la corrupción*, 2017, p.5.

11 "Criminosos de 60 países nos gangues que atuam em Portugal", *ASJP*, 20 March 2013.

Groups can include individuals from countries that have no cultural, historical, or geographical links to the Iberian Peninsula. In Portugal, for example, the Central Department of Investigation and Criminal Action (*Departamento Central de Investigação e Ação Penal*, or DCIAP) recently charged 36 defendants – most of whom are citizens of Georgia – for theft, robbery, criminal association, and money laundering.¹²

Crime groups are also international in nature, with 69% of groups in Spain operating transnationally.¹³ The international arms trade network led by Pierre Konrad Dadak is a case in point. His organisation used a Polish company to distribute weapons, via criminals based in Marseille, to the Democratic Republic of Congo, in contravention of UN arms embargos. The hub for this operation was the island of Ibiza; following his 2018 arrest, he was charged with extortion, fraud, and money laundering.¹⁴

This international scope requires collaboration with extra-territorial crime groups. For example, the 2015 detention of British gangster Robert Dawes in Portugal exposed his connections to the Ndrangheta, highlighting how the Calabrian mafia had used Portugal as a disembarkation point for cocaine shipped from cartels in Colombia.¹⁵

Activities and Locations

Groups are involved in a range of activities, from human trafficking and money laundering, to extortion and counterfeiting. The most prominent activity for the majority of groups is, unsurprisingly, drug trafficking.

Of the 444 crime groups identified by Spain's Intelligence Center Against Terrorism and Organised Crime (*Centro de Inteligencia contra el Terrorismo y el Crimen Organizado*, or CITCO) in 2016, a clear majority (283 groups, or 64% of the total) were involved in drugs: 115 in cocaine trafficking (25% of the total); 103 (23%) in hashish; 40 (9%) in cannabis; and 25 (6%) in heroin.¹⁶

Spain and Portugal see hashish and cannabis arrive from North Africa, as well as cocaine produced in South America, which then supplies their domestic markets before continuing further afield into Europe.

Drugs are mainly smuggled via the sea, if the location of drug seizures can be considered a proxy measure of trafficking routes. In 2017, almost 90% of cocaine seizures in Portugal took place along maritime routes, with just over 9% occurring via air travel.¹⁷ This can include shipping containers – with drugs concealed in other merchandise – as well as speed boats. The “drop-off” method is also used, which involves traffickers throwing containers filled with drugs into the sea for them to be retrieved later by smaller boats arriving from the destination country.¹⁸

12 “Pedro Felício: ‘O crime organizado é a maior ameaça à segurança dos cidadãos da UE’”, *Diário de Notícias*, 6 July 2018.

13 CITCO, *Informe de situación: Lucha contra el crimen organizado y la corrupción*, 2017, p.5.

14 “España destapa una red internacional de tráfico de armas que investiga la ONU”, *El Español*, 18 February 2018.

15 “Patrão do crime europeu com fortes ligações a Portugal”, *JN*, 11 December 2015.

16 CITCO, *Informe de situación: Lucha contra el crimen organizado y la corrupción*, 2017, p.6.

17 *Combate ao Tráfico de Estupefacientes em Portugal, Relatório Anual 2017*, Unidade Nacional De Combate Ao Tráfico De Estupefacientes and Secção Central De Informação Criminal, 2018, p.10.

18 Departamento de Seguridad Nacional, *Informe Anual de Seguridad Nacional 2017*, Ministerio de la Presidencia del Gobierno, Relaciones con las Cortes e Igualdad, 2018, pp.31-32.

Yet these routes can often change. In the mid-2000s the preferred trafficking route for South American cocaine was via West Africa, through the Maghrib, and into Europe. While this is still an attractive route – not least due to weak law enforcement capability – there is evidence that the Caribbean is now a major transit point.¹⁹

The impact of drug trafficking is large. The Castañita Cartel, which controls trafficking routes in southern Spain and the area around Gibraltar, is estimated to have 3,000 people under its pay. It has also contributed to an escalation in violence, in part due to the practice of *paleros*, which refers to cartel members disguising themselves as police officers to seize and steal drugs from rival organisations. In turn, traffickers have attacked genuine police officers due to suspicions that they may be *paleros*.²⁰

While contraband is popularly seen as coming *from* South America and Africa *into* Europe, illicit trade does flow in both directions. Portugal is a destination and transit point for ecstasy and MDMA originating in the Netherlands, for example, which is then transported onwards to Brasil.²¹

Drugs are also *domestically produced* in Spain, which then go on to serve both the domestic and foreign markets. Cannabis is cultivated in “indoor farms” by a variety of actors, ranging from struggling business owners looking for additional revenue streams, to individual citizens in rural areas which have a relatively low police presence.²²

Larger groups are also involved: in 2017 Spanish police disrupted 60 indoor farms – and seized 55,000kg of cannabis – under the control of Chinese groups. The effect of this domestic production has been substantial enough to cause a fall in demand for Moroccan hashish.²³ There is little evidence of much domestic drug production in Portugal, meanwhile.²⁴

Beyond drug trafficking, the remaining groups in Spain were primarily involved in robbery (82 groups, or 19% of the total), human trafficking and sexual exploitation (24 groups, or 5%), fraud (39 groups, or 9%), and money laundering (16 groups, or 4%).²⁵ In Portugal, gambling, prostitution, extortion, human trafficking, smuggling, and money laundering are features of the crime scene.²⁶

19 Ibid; for more on this shift, see Eric L. Olson and Nina Gordon, “Shifting trafficking routes for illicit narcotics and the importance of Spain-US counter-narcotics cooperation”, *Real Instituto Elcano*, 25th June 2018.

20 “Las Bandas De Narcos Del Campo De Gibraltar Se Organizan: Los Castañitas Lideran El Primer Cártel”, *El Mundo*, 17 October 2018.

21 European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), *Portugal Country Drug Report 2018*, EMCDDA, 2018, available at: http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/countries/drug-reports/2018/portugal/drug-use_en.

22 “El cultivo doméstico o bajo techo de marihuana, un negocio ilícito que se dispara en España”, *ABC*, 27 November 2017.

23 Departamento de Seguridad Nacional, *Informe Anual de Seguridad Nacional 2017*, Ministerio de la Presidencia del Gobierno, Relaciones con las Cortes e Igualdad, 2018, p.32.

24 *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, Vol II: Money Laundering*, Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, March 2018, p.168.

25 CITCO, *Informe de situación: Lucha contra el crimen organizado y la corrupción*, 2017, p.6.

26 *Portugal 2017 Crime & Safety Report*, OSAC, US Department of State, Bureau of Diplomatic Security, June 2017.

Polycriminality is common, particularly amongst those involved in trafficking – be that of drugs, other contraband, or people²⁷ – which suggests that groups are generalists,²⁸ who can adapt their knowledge and expertise to a variety of criminal markets.

Spain and Portugal are destination countries for *human trafficking*, whether for sexual or labour exploitation, with victims coming from Africa.²⁹ Foreign groups are routinely involved in this crime, with Romanian, Nigerian, and Chinese organised crime groups particularly active in this field alongside their Spanish counterparts.³⁰ There remain knowledge gaps here, with Europol stating that the trafficking operations bringing Angolan victims to the EU via Portugal are largely unknown.³¹

The *arms trafficking* situation is similarly unclear, with Spanish authorities acknowledging that the number of illegal firearms in circulation is unknown.³² According to the Guardia Civil, the illicit firearms market mostly involves handguns – many of which are illegally reactivated – alongside weapons from the Balkans.

The *locations* of criminal activity reflect areas with a high population density and key coastal positions. Spanish crime groups concentrate their operations in Madrid and Barcelona – with over 100 groups active in the two cities – and coastal provinces such as Valencia, Alicante, Cadiz, and Malaga – which have between 51 and 100 groups active.³³ In Portugal, activity is concentrated around Lisbon, Porto, Setubal, Braga, and Aveiro.³⁴

Overall, it is clear the location and geography of Spain and Portugal have an outsized influence on the criminal scene in both countries, where traffickers have utilised their knowledge, experience, and connections to continue to smuggle drugs and other contraband into the peninsula.

27 Carmen Jordá-Sanz and Laura Requena-Espada, "¿Cómo se organizan los grupos criminales según su actividad delictiva principal? Descripción desde una muestra española", *Revista Criminalidad*, Vol 55, No 1, 2013, p.41.

28 CITCO, *Informe de situación: Lucha contra el crimen organizado y la corrupción*, 2017, p.6.

29 *Tráfico de Seres Humanos Relatorio de 2017*, Ministério da Administração Interna, Observatório do Tráfico de Seres Humanos, 2018, p.31; Transcrime, *From Illegal Markets to Legitimate Businesses: The Portfolio of Organised Crime in Europe*, Università degli Studi di Trento, 2015, p.130.

30 Transcrime, *From Illegal Markets to Legitimate Businesses: The Portfolio of Organised Crime in Europe*, Università degli Studi di Trento, 2015, p.130.

31 "Portugal cada vez mais na rota de tráfico de menores, diz Europol", *Diário de Notícias*, 18 October 2018.

32 European Investigative Collaborations (EIC), "España, zonal restringida a las armas", *El Mundo*, 20 March 2016.

33 CITCO, *Informe de situación: Lucha contra el crimen organizado y la corrupción*, 2017, p.10.

34 *Relatorio Annual de Segurança Interna (RAS) 2017*, Sistema de Segurança Interna, 2017, pp.72-73.

3 Terrorism

Spain has a storied history of terrorism and terrorist attacks, most notably with the Basque separatist group ETA (*Euskadi Ta Askatasuna*, or Basque Homeland and Liberty).³⁵ Active during Franco's dictatorship as well as during the transition to democracy, the group waged a sustained campaign of assassinations, bombings, and kidnappings in the Basque country and the rest of Spain. ETA carried out several high-profile attacks, including the assassination of Spanish Prime Minister Luis Carrero Blanco in 1973.³⁶ In total the group killed 829 people and injured thousands more, before declaring a ceasefire in 2010 that culminated in the group's dissolution in May 2018.³⁷

Over the last two decades, jihadist terrorism has been at the forefront of security concerns, and much of this has had overlaps with "regular" criminal activity. The most notable example is that of the 11th March 2004 Madrid bombings (known as 11-M in Spain), when an al-Qaeda cell exploded ten bombs inside four trains in the capital, killing 191 people and injuring hundreds more. The explosives had been purchased from the criminal market, and the jihadist cell itself was previously involved with trafficking hashish, ecstasy, and MDMA.³⁸

Such crossovers between crime and terrorism continue to exist today. This section gives an overview of jihadist terrorism in Spain and Portugal, highlighting how the crime-terror nexus in Spain has seen jihadists routinely engage in what are considered "regular" criminal activities, albeit for an extremist cause. Indeed, these crossovers even led to the 2014 creation of an intelligence agency designed to tackle *both* organised crime and terrorism: the Intelligence Center Against Terrorism and Organised Crime (*Centro de Inteligencia contra el Terrorismo y el Crimen Organizado*, or CITCO).

This can also be found within the far-right scene, albeit to a lesser extent. In Portugal, the recently-formed *Los Bandidos* motorcycle club, for example, is led by the 69-year-old far-right activist Mario Machado. The group is an offshoot of the Hells Angels, and Portuguese police believe the two to be involved in criminal activities involving firearms and drug trafficking.³⁹ It is unclear, however, just how much influence far-right ideology has over the group's criminality.

35 We define terrorism as symbolic acts of politically motivated violence. See Peter R. Neumann and M.L.R. Smith, *The Strategy of Terrorism* (London: Routledge, 2008), p.8.

36 "829 muertos en 43 años de terrorismo", *El Periódico*, 20 October 2011.

37 "ETA anuncia su disolución oficial, tras décadas de campaña separatista vasca", *New York Times*, 2 May 2018.

38 "Así cubrimos el 11-M", *El País*, 9 March 2016.

39 "Hells Angels são liderados em Portugal por mestre de artes marciais de 69 anos", *Público*, 12 July 2018; "Portuguese police nab dozens of Hells Angels biker gang members", *Reuters*, 11 July 2018.

Attacks, Plots, and Foreign Fighters

Since the 2004 Madrid bombings there have been two jihadist attacks in Spain, which were carried out on consecutive days in August 2017 by a 10-man cell of Moroccan jihadists based in the town of Ripoll.⁴⁰ The cell had been hoarding butane canisters and manufacturing TATP explosives in a house in the town of Alcanar, 200km from Barcelona. On August 16th the house exploded in an apparent accident, killing the leader of the cell, Abdelbaki Es Satty, as well as another member, Youssef Aalla.

This prompted the cell to abandon their plans for a bomb attack. Instead, the following day one of the cell members, Younes Abouyaaqoub, carried out a vehicle-ramming attack on Las Ramblas promenade in Barcelona, killing 14 people. On August 18th, five other members of the cell – wearing fake suicide vests – carried out a vehicle-ramming and knife attack in the town of Cambrils, killing one woman before they were shot dead by police. Abouyaaqoub, who had fled Las Ramblas following his attack, was eventually located by the police on August 21st, when he was shot and killed.

Aside from those plotting attacks, Spain has an active jihadist scene involved in propaganda, recruitment, financing, and facilitation for the jihadist movement. The high-level of activity is reflected in the number of arrests: between 2012 and 2017, 284 arrests were made for jihadist-related activity.⁴¹ Since the start of the conflict in Syria and the recent “wave” of jihadist attacks in Europe, there have been several notable jihadist-related events:

- *March 2012*: Jordanian Mudhar Hussein Almalki (known as “The Librarian”) was arrested after posting a list online of potential targets for a terrorist attack. Almalki had been a member of the jihadist group Ansar al Mujahideen since 2005.⁴²
- *August 2012*: Two Chechen men were arrested in Valdepeñas, Spain, en route to France, over a terrorist plot. A Turkish national was also detained in La Linea de la Concepcion, where explosives were discovered in his apartment.⁴³
- *January and March 2015*: Spanish authorities in Ceuta disrupted a cell that was planning terrorist attacks in Spain. The leader of the cell, Farid Mohammed Al Lal, had prior criminal convictions, and radicalised in Topas prison after meeting Mohamed Achraf, who himself had been recruiting inmates convicted for drug trafficking.⁴⁴ Three members of the cell were convicted in October 2016.⁴⁵

40 For more on the August 2017 attacks, see Fernando Reinares and Carola García-Calvo, “Spaniards, You Are Going to Suffer”: The Inside Story of the August 2017 Attacks in Barcelona and Cambrils”, *CTC Sentinel*, Vol 11, Issue 1, 2018, pp.1-11.

41 The annual breakdown is: 2012 (8), 2013 (20), 2014 (34), 2015 (75), 2016 (69), and 2017 (78). Figures from Europol’s annual *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Reports (TESAT) 2013; 2014; 2015; 2016; and 2017*.

42 “El yihadista detenido en Valencia propuso atentar contra Aznar, Solana y Obama”, *El Mundo*, 30 March 2012.

43 “Detenidos tres islamistas de Al Qaida en España con planes de atentar”, *ABC*, 3 August 2012.

44 “El fiscal dice que la célula yihadista de Ceuta preparaba un atentado inminente”, *EFE*, 3 November 2016.

45 “Ruz decreta prisión incondicional para tres de los yihadistas detenidos en Ceuta”, *El Periódico*, 27 October 2016.

- *June 2015*: Abdeljalil Ait El Kaid, from Alicante, was arrested in Warsaw, Poland after returning from fighting in Syria. He was convicted in November 2018 over plans to carry out terrorist attacks in Europe, and sentenced to eight years.⁴⁶
- *August 2017*: a cell based in Ripoll carried out two vehicle-ramming attacks in Barcelona and Cambrils, killing 16 people in total.
- *June 2018*: Fuad M. and Rhimou B., based in Ceuta, were convicted for recruiting children to participate in jihadist activity.⁴⁷
- *September 2018*: A special court in Spain convicted Portugal's Fábio Almeida to four years in prison for his involvement in a terrorist network that recruited women and children for Islamic State.⁴⁸
- *October 2018*: Operation “Escribano” disrupted a network of 25 inmates operating across 17 prisons in Spain. The prisoners had been recruiting individuals in support of Islamic State, and included those convicted for extremism as well as “regular” criminal convicts.⁴⁹

More than six thousand European “foreign fighters” have joined jihadist groups in Syria and Iraq. The mobilisation has also affected Spain, with 223 of its citizens or residents having travelled to the conflict zone. Of these, 48 have died and an additional 37 have returned, with the remainder believed to still be in the region.⁵⁰ From Portugal, meanwhile, between 10 to 15 foreign fighters have emerged,⁵¹ and the country's authorities have noted the potential threat from returnees looking to transit via Portugal into Europe.⁵²

Prisons

Analysis of the jihadist scene in Spain shows that prisons can be places of radicalisation. The Elcano Royal Institute has examined 152 cases of jihadists who either died or were convicted between 1995 and 2018. An estimated 10.5% of those were radicalised – in whole or in part – behind bars.⁵³

Abdelbakir Es Satty, the charismatic leader who recruited and radicalised the Ripoll cell, is one such example. He had previously been convicted of drug smuggling in 2010, when he was caught attempting to smuggle 121kg of hashish in the southern port of Algeciras.⁵⁴ By this point he had long been associating with extremists, though it was inside Castellón prison that he met a member of the al-Qaeda network responsible for the 2004 bombings, Rachid Aglif, and radicalised further.⁵⁵ This highlights

46 “Un yihadista se disculpa y acepta 8 años de cárcel”, *La Vanguardia*, 11 June 2018.

47 “Dos de los cuatro ceutíes juzgados por presunto terrorismo, absueltos”, *El Faro de Ceuta*, 14 July 2018.

48 “Português condenado em Madrid a quatro anos de prisão por envolvimento em rede terrorista”, *Observador*, 27 September 2018.

49 “Cae una red de radicalización en las cárceles con 25 presos yihadistas implicados”, *El País*, 2 October 2018.

50 *Informe Anual de Seguridad Nacional 2017*, Ministerio de la Presidencia del Gobierno, Relaciones con las Cortes e Igualdad, 2018, p.25.

51 This includes foreign nationals whose parents are Portuguese; “Pai de jihadistas portugueses quer netos e noras em Portugal”, *Diário de Notícias*, 22 September 2018.

52 *Relatório Anual de Segurança Interna (RASI) 2017*, Sistema de Segurança Interna, 2017, p.70.

53 Fernando Reinales, Carola García-Calvo and Álvaro Vicente, “Yihadismo y prisiones: un análisis del caso español”, *Real Instituto Elcano*, 14 November 2018.

54 “El delito ‘no grave’ del imam de Ripoll: 120 kilos de droga”, *El Mundo*, 24 August 2017.

55 “El imán de Ripoll trabó amistad en prisión con un terrorista del 11-M”, *El País*, 20 August 2017.

the potential for prisons as not only places of radicalisation, but also places where extremists can “network”.

Yet the role of prison appears to have diminished in recent years. Between 2004 and 2011, 28% of individuals within Elcano’s dataset radicalised in prison, compared with just 7% between 2012 and 2018. Other places, such as private houses or the online sphere, were more frequent locations. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the danger of prison radicalisation has disappeared, as shown by the disruption in October 2018 of a network of 25 extremists attempting to radicalise and recruit other inmates across 17 prisons in Spain.⁵⁶

There are several, well-established factors behind prison radicalisation that should not be overlooked. Not only could an inmate be undergoing a “cognitive opening” – for example, due to a personal crisis related to their imprisonment – but there is also a need for new networks in the absence of family and friends, as well as physical protection in a sometimes hostile and violent environment. Given that prisons are places in which criminal and extremist milieus are physically in their closest proximity, it is in this environment that linkages between crime and terror can emerge: Spanish authorities will therefore have to closely manage the 134 jihadist convicts within its prisons.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ “Cae una red de radicalización en las cárceles con 25 presos yihadistas implicados”, *El País*, 2 October 2018.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

4 Recommendations

This paper has examined potential links between crime and terrorism in Spain and Portugal. While we have found no institutionalised, formalised links between organised crime and terrorism, there are areas of concern, especially when it comes to the merging of criminal and jihadist milieus – the so-called social nexus (see Box 1) – and the use of criminal means by extremist actors. One is the potential for individuals with criminal backgrounds to use their skills – be it in forging documents, procuring firearms, or raising money through criminal means – to facilitate terrorism. Another is the potential for the radicalisation of criminal inmates within prisons.

To prevent such links from re-emerging or becoming further entrenched, we recommend the following actions and/or good practices:

1. Effective monitoring

We recommend that authorities continue to periodically review their statistics on organised crime and terrorism, and consciously monitor them for emerging linkages between the two phenomena. Some areas – such as the link between drugs and terrorism – may require further research.

2. Re-thinking radicalisation

Given the partial merging of terrorist and extremist milieus, core assumptions about radicalisation need to be reconsidered. The behaviour of jihadists with criminal pasts often contradicts the notion that extremism correlates with religious behaviour. Where needed, we recommend that authorities update their checklists, indicators, and training materials in order to reflect changing patterns and profiles.

3. Safer prisons

The authorities in Spain have recognised the importance of prisons as potential incubators of links between crime and terrorism. We encourage them to move forward with implementing systematic efforts to make prisons safer from crime, terrorism, and any links between them. It is also important to have adequate post-release arrangements, which involve re-integration as well as monitoring.

4. Countering all streams of terrorist financing

Efforts to countering terrorist finance have excessively focused on the international financial system – with meagre results. We recommend that authorities broaden their efforts at countering terrorist finance to include small-scale and petty crime, such as drug dealing, theft, robberies, and the trafficking in goods.

5. Information sharing

As the lines between terrorism and “ordinary” crime have become increasingly blurred, relevant agencies need to become more effective at sharing relevant information across departments and “disciplines”, as well as forming new “coalition” of individuals and institutions that may not be used to working with each other. CITCO is one such example of the fusion between counterterrorism and anti-organised crime.

We recommend that governments continue to review existing channels and systems of information exchange, explore creating new partnerships (such as with local authorities, civil society, and the private sector), and make appropriate changes reflecting the new – and multi-dimensional – nature of the threat.



Crime Terror Nexus

THE CRIME TERROR NEXUS

The Crime Terror Nexus is a project that investigates links between crime and terrorism, and identifies better ways to counter them.

Over the course of 18 months, we are documenting links between crime and terrorism across the European Union. Our findings are disseminated through reports, events, and workshops.

We are partnering with officials and local stakeholders to create new and innovative approaches that contribute to countering crime and making our countries safer.

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Panta Rhei Research Ltd. is fully independent in implementing the project and has editorial responsibility for all views and opinions expressed herein.

For more information, visit www.crimeterrornexus.com.

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