

A Reflection in the Tide: Maritime Security and the Crime Terror Nexus

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Introduction

The maritime domain remains one of the world's least governed spaces. With a lack of security architecture many maritime regions are weak points vulnerable to insecurity. Academic work focuses on concepts of 'Maritime Security', 'Blue Economy', and 'Crime Terror Nexus'. While there is growing academic and policy attention many of the concepts remain contested and have become buzzwords for a vast array of academic and policy priorities. This article will seek to engage with the theoretical landscape of maritime security and the crime terror nexus as well as highlighting growing concerns due to the threat multiplier of climate change. It will be argued that the theoretical and policy discussions around maritime security and the role of the crime terror nexus need to be re-analysed considering the growing insecurity emanating from climate breakdown.

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Crimes such as piracy, people trafficking, narcotics, arms, and environmental crimes such as illegal fishing or pollution are increasingly important dimensions of ocean governance and maritime security.² Criminal activities often overlap with politically violent groups some of which perpetrate acts of terrorism. Further, maritime communities are becoming increasingly vulnerable due to the impacts of climate change. As a result, understanding the relationship between these vulnerabilities and maritime security is crucial for academics and policymaker's who are instrumental in understanding and combating this growing insecurity. This commentary will seek to address the crime terror nexus its consequences for maritime security and the potential threat multiplier impact of climate change.

Crime terror nexus

Crime-terror nexus is an analytical lens that grew in academic popularity post 9/11 often used to interrogate the linkages between criminal and terrorist milieu's and how this interaction shapes contemporary security.³ Three factors are widely focused on as driving the increase in the crime-terror nexus. The reduction in state funding for terrorism, globalisation presenting opportunities with easy border crossing, new communications technology, and alternative global financial structures, as well as the presence of weak states.⁴

Much of the academic focus on the crime terror nexus focuses on how criminal activity is instrumentalised to finance acts of terrorism.⁵ This is a key question driven by policy relevance. Further, large academic focus has been placed on the role of drug trafficking as a key support of terrorism.⁶ A wide variety of terrorist organisations maintain links to drug trafficking which often flows through ungoverned maritime spaces.⁷ These are crucial components of the crime terror nexus which operate in the maritime space. However, the overlap between criminal and terrorist activity cuts across a wide range of activity, motivations, and incentives.⁸ The focus on financing and drugs also follows two of the key components of the 'War on Terror' which had an impact on the academic priorities during the genesis of research on the crime-terror nexus.⁹

The analytical tool of crime terror-nexus has been heavily criticized as a simplistic academic theory based upon applying assumptions to criminal and terrorist behaviour rather than engaging with the complexities of context and the economies of crime and violence.¹⁰ The concept generated a variety of policy responses that often obscured the root causes of insecurity and provided answers that placed the crime-terror nexus outside of the broader literature on the study of violence.¹¹ Further, in the maritime domain the conflation of piracy and terrorism post 9/11 facilitated policy responses

² Bueger, C. and Edmunds, T. (2020). Blue crime: Conceptualising transnational organised crime at sea. *Marine Policy*.

³ Omelicheva, M.Y. and Markowitz, L.P. (2021). Rethinking Intersections of Crime and Terrorism: Insights from Political Economies of Violence. *International Studies Review*, 23.

⁴ Omelicheva, M.Y. and Markowitz, L.P. (2021).

⁵ Shelley, L.I. (2013). *Dirty Entanglements Corruption, Crime, and Terrorism*. Cambridge University Press.

⁶ Ünal, M.C. (2019). Deciphering the crime-terror Nexus: an empirical analysis of the structural characteristics of terrorists in Narco-terror networks. *Crime, Law, and Social Change*. doi:10.1007/s10611-019-09858-1.

⁷ Mullins, S. and Wither, J.K. (2016).

⁸ Mullins, S. and Wither, J.K. (2016).

⁹ Krishan Aggarwal, N. (2011). Medical Orientalism and the War on Terror: Depictions of Arabs and Muslims in the Psychodynamic Literature post-9/11. *Journal of Muslim Mental Health*.

¹⁰ Omelicheva, M.Y. and Markowitz, L.P. (2021).

¹¹ *Ibid*.

that mirrored the war on terror despite little evidence of cross over between pirates and acts of terrorism.¹²

Incorporating the concepts of a crime terror nexus alongside work on the economies of violence produces a more nuanced understanding of the organisational, tactical, and financial crossovers that facilitate acts of terror not only through organised crime but a variety of factors endemic in unstable environments. This can build a better understanding of the interplay between criminality and violence across a wide array of groups rather than simply focusing on the interactions between established terror groups and organised crime.

Omelicheva and Markowitz (2021) argue that by incorporating the role of the state as well as how the structure of resources and economic activity influence the preferences of violent groups for crime and the consequences of terrorist–criminal convergence. Crossovers between the worlds of organised crime and acts of terrorism are extensive with a multitude of different violent organisations. However, terrorist organisations and criminal organisations rarely coordinate or act in tandem due to their different objectives, their crossover in types of activity and tactics is more prominent.¹³

Blue economy and Maritime Security

The concept of a Blue Economy is often referenced by academics and policy makers. It is a poorly defined concept that broadly aims to engage with the social, economic and security relationship between people, the land, and the ocean. Policy based around developing a Blue Economy aims to address root causes, not only symptoms of economic and security issues for maritime communities.¹⁴ It integrates two dimensions, the provision of goods and services, and the protection and security of marine resources, property, and life.¹⁵ It represents the growing territorialisation of the ocean supporting political and economic opportunities through calls for greater governance.¹⁶ Despite the emerging focus on a holistic notion of building a blue economy maritime security is largely governed in conventional and kinetic ways. The Horn of Africa and the Northeast Indian ocean is one of the most vulnerable maritime regions to criminality and non-state actor violence. In 2005 piracy soared largely emanating from Somalia. Piracy was treated by the U.S in the framework of the war on terror and by 2007 a hard military response was endorsed.¹⁷ Security has been established in this region through the deployment of large military resources that are not conducive to a human security approach and addressing the origin of criminality and violence emanating from unstable maritime states like Somalia.

Efforts to build a Blue Economy must integrate a response to crime and violence as well as building a human security approach to address the root causes rather than just the symptoms of insecurity. Many key maritime states and regions suffer from weak governance, most prominently the horn of Africa with Somalia a notorious case of

¹² Singh, C. and Bedi, A.S. (2016). War on Piracy: The conflation of Somali piracy with terrorism in discourse, tactic, and law. *Security Dialogue*, 47(5), pp.440–458. doi:10.1177/0967010616665275.

¹³ Chalk, P. and Monica, S. (2008). *The Maritime Dimension of International Security: Terrorism, Piracy, and Challenges for the United States*. United States: Rand Corp Santa Monica Ca.

¹⁴ Bueger, C. and Edmunds, T. (2020).

¹⁵ Swanepoel, E. (2017). *The Nexus Between Prosperity In The African Maritime Domain and Maritime Security*. [online] JSTOR. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep25941> [Accessed 29 May 2022].

¹⁶ Germond-Duret, C. (2022). Framing the Blue Economy: Placelessness, Development and Sustainability. *Development and Change*, 53(2), pp.308–334. doi:10.1111/dech.12703.

¹⁷ Singh, C. and Bedi, A.S. (2016).

maritime crime and piracy. Taking steps to build a blue economy in states suffering from weak governance is particularly complex as crime and violence often feature prominently with the state sometime contributing to the instability.

A growing concern?

With global inaction the severe impacts of climate change seem inevitable, many vulnerable regions are already beginning to suffer. Maritime nations and communities are often on the frontline.¹⁸ In the long term the consequences of climate change will have deep socio-economic impacts that will drive maritime insecurity.¹⁹ Many of these issues derive from non-traditional threats and must be conceptualised within the framework of human security. Climate change is putting coastal communities at risk and may push them towards criminal activity; socio-economic insecurity is likely to increase maritime crime and security threats.²⁰ Under pressure vulnerable people may be driven towards crime and overlapping political violence.

Climate change is a threat multiplier which will spark traditional and non-traditional security threats in direct and indirect ways. Maritime communities will suffer directly through declining economic opportunities alongside food and water insecurity. Indirect effects through climate related migration and regional resource scarcity may also spark conflict. This is a prominent issue for some of the world's key maritime regions with the Northwest Indian Ocean one of the most vulnerable maritime spaces to climate change as well as security threats from organised crime, piracy, and terrorism.²¹ This threat necessitates a human security approach alongside the integration of climate action and awareness of the traditional and non-traditional security threats that will be generated by climate change in maritime spaces. As climate change will change the root cause of insecurity in the maritime space it is necessary that academic theory that feeds into policy responses is reviewed. Concepts like the crime-terror nexus and blue economy must be better defined and adjusted to climate impact and the following security consequences.

Conclusion

The interaction between criminality and violence including acts of terrorism has seen much academic and policy focus. The maritime space has been a growing area of focus particularly due to instability in the horn of Africa and Southeast Asia. The academic study of the crime-terror nexus its impact on maritime security and the development of a blue economy faces many theoretical and normative issues. The associated policies have also proved to be based on assumptions that do not always play out. The confluence of piracy in Somalia and terrorism stands out as an example. This assumption of a strong crime-terror nexus facilitated a military approach to the issue

¹⁸ United Nations Development Programme (2021). *Human Development Report 2020: The Next Frontier - Human Development and the Anthropocene*. [online] S.L.: United Nations. Available at: <http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2020.pdf>.

¹⁹ Germond, B. and Mazari, A.D. (2019). Climate change and maritime security. *Marine Policy*, 99, pp.262–266.

²⁰ United Nations Development Programme (2021). *Human Development Report 2020: The Next Frontier - Human Development and the Anthropocene*. [online] S.L.: United Nations. Available at: <http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2020.pdf>.

²¹ Alsawalqa, R.O. and Venter, D. (2021). Piracy and Maritime Security in the North-Western Indian Ocean: From the Gulf of Oman to the Waters off the Somali Coast. *Insight on Africa*, p.097508782110492. doi:10.1177/09750878211049224.

which had little true links with terror organisations.²² The academic and policy assumptions need to be re-analysed to address the root causes rather than just the symptoms of maritime insecurity. Climate change will play a significant role in shaping the insecurity and conflict of the coming decades particularly in the maritime domain. This further necessitates a re-evaluation of concepts like the crime-terror nexus, maritime security, and blue economy and associated policies. Overall, maritime security is a dynamic issue that requires an audit of the approaches used across academic and practice to understand and implement security particularly in light of theoretical frailties and the threat multiplying impact of climate change.

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²² Singh, C. and Bedi, A.S. (2016).

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