



## **THE CONFLATION OF ORGANIZED CRIME AND TERRORISM IN VENEZUELA**

**Date:** November 22, 2019

*Disclaimer: This briefing note contains the encapsulation of views presented by the speaker and does not exclusively represent the views of the Canadian Association for Security and Intelligence Studies.*

### **KEY EVENTS**

On November 22, 2019, Victoria Dittmar presented on the “Conflation of Organized Crime and Terrorism in Venezuela” at the 2019 CASIS West Coast Security Conference. The presentation was followed by a group panel for questions & answers. Main discussion topics included organized crime and possible solutions for the aforementioned issue in Caribbean Latin America.

### **NATURE OF DISCUSSION**

#### **Presentation**

The speaker conceptualized the link between organized crime and terrorism, the involved armed actors and the relations between them, and the implications for regional security in Venezuela.

#### **Question Period**

During the question period, the results of implementing a proof of purpose of travel in the Caribbean Latin America were discussed.

### **BACKGROUND**

#### **Presentation**

Canada has an interest in Venezuela in terms of its diplomacy/foreign relations, trade and mining, human rights concerns, and its relationship with neighbouring countries. Venezuela is arguably in a geographically strategic area for organized crime and terrorism. It is also one of the biggest producers of cocaine and has easy access to Columbia and surrounding Caribbean Islands. Additionally,

Venezuela has been accused of being a hermitage for terrorist organizations and their operations. There is arguably a space for the conflation between organized crime and terrorism in Venezuela, and as such, both occur in a nexus of what could be described as a crime-terror continuum. However, it must be understood that although there is room for conflation between organized crime and terrorism, the two are not conflated.

The crime-terror nexus exists in the area where both organized crime and terrorist groups join forces for a common cause. Terrorist groups benefit from illegal economies, meanwhile, organized crime groups adopt terrorist methods to achieve their goals. Furthermore, both groups recruit from the same pool of individuals.

The actors in organized crime and terrorism can be criminal actors (e.g., gangs or pirates), terrorist actors (e.g., Hezbollah), Violent Transnational Social Movement (VTSM) actors (e.g., ISIS), or hybrid actors (e.g., Colectivos, National Liberation Army, Popular Liberation Army etc.). Sometimes even the Venezuelan State can be an actor involved in the crime-terror continuum. All of these groups operate as networks. As there is a crime-terror nexus, there is also a nexus between the involved actors. The alliances between these actors can be based on ideology/identity or can be instrumental, and there is a possibility for collaboration between each other. Gangs, such as the Colectivos, may act as governments in the most marginalized areas of Venezuela. Other criminal actors act in collaboration with the State as opposed to against it.

In this context of crime-terror continuum and areas where the State fails to govern properly, governance and regional security materialize through other means. That is, they materialize through extra-legal governance. Violent non-state actors resort to means of bypassing the law and/or use violent means to control and govern territories. As such, extra-legal governance occurs along-side, in collaboration with, or in competition against the State. Non-state actors govern in the “upperworld” and “underworld” by providing illegal services (e.g., protection, food etc.), regulating markets or social interactions, and enforcing “justice mechanisms.”

Moreover, borders in Venezuela are not deterrents for organized crime and terrorist groups. Venezuela has become a safe haven and centre of operations for violent non-state actors, organized crime groups, and terrorist organizations. Illegal and political activities are conducted by both state and non-state actors.

The state engages in criminal roles, while non-state actors engage in political roles.

We are faced with some obstacles as the hybrid nature of violent non-state actors do not fit our current classifications and policies. Violent non-state actors can be providers of governance, which is not enough to counter from a purely law enforcement perspective. It's important to consider how regime change will affect negotiations and relationships between and within groups in the crime-terror continuum. Additionally, new policies should be adopted that can better accommodate and help understand these new actors and their associated characteristics.

### **Question Period**

In 2018, in the context of terrorism and extremism, organized crime in Caribbean Latin America, an obligation to prove purpose of travel, was implemented. However, it has not yet been used successfully. The problems that arose included the role of political convenience, the law being absolutely necessary for its success, and the fact that geographic regions were not yet designated. Furthermore, the pushback to this implementation was intense.

## **KEY POINTS OF DISCUSSION**

### **Presentation**

- Venezuela is in a geographically strategic area for organized crime and terrorism.
- Organized crime and terrorism have a symbiotic relationship in a nexus of what can be described as a crime-terror continuum; however, the two are not conflated.
- The alliance between actors involved in the crime-terror continuum in Venezuela are loose and decentralized, instrumental, and based on ideology and/or identity.
- The actors involved in the crime-terror continuum can be hybrid actors and can consist of criminal actors, terrorist actors, VTSM actors, and even the Venezuelan state.
- Due to the nature of the crime-terror continuum, governance and regional security are materialized through extra-legal governance.

### Question Period

- Efforts in 2018 to implement purpose of travel have not been successful yet.
- The pushback of implementing purpose of travel to certain nations was intense.
- Other issues that arose included the role of political convenience, the role of the law, and unclear designated geographic regions.



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