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Review – The Terrorist-Criminal Nexus

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By [Robert Bunker](#) on July 10, 2013

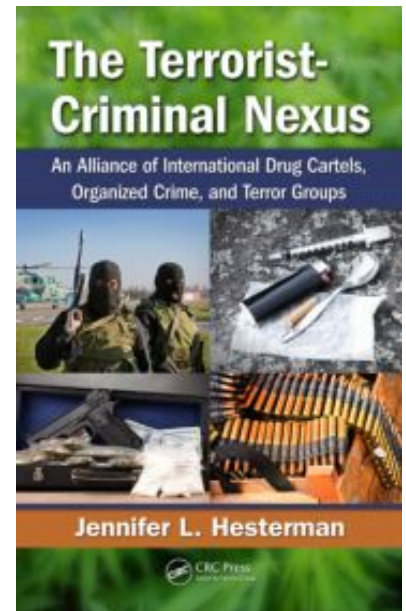
[The Terrorist-Criminal Nexus: An Alliance of International Drug Cartels, Organized Crime, and Terror Groups](#)

By: Jennifer L. Hesterman

Boca Raton: CRC Press, 2013

The author of *The Terrorist-Criminal Nexus*, Jennifer L. Hesterman, has a solid professional career as a retired U.S. Air Force Colonel with multiple unit commands, including leadership of an Air Force Base EOC (Emergency Operations Center) during 9-11, and subsequent employment with both a global intelligence firm and as the director of national and homeland security programs at American Military University, a distance education institution. Additionally, she holds two master's degrees from Johns Hopkins University and Air University and is currently a doctoral candidate at Benedictine University in Chicago.

The work itself has an evolutionary pedigree dating back to an April 2004 paper written by Hesterman titled [Transnational Crime and the Criminal-Terrorist Nexus: Synergies and Corporate Trends](#). The ninety page paper fulfilled part of her Air Force Fellows graduation requirements as a National Defense Fellow with the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington, DC. The work was subsequently published as the [Walker Paper No. 1](#) with the Air University Press in May 2005. Of interest is that the dyad relationship – organized criminal and terrorist – identified by Hesterman has now been expanded into a triad relationship – drug cartel, organized criminal and terrorist – in her new book.



The *Terrorist-Criminal Nexus* squarely focuses on the threat posed by violent non-state actors (VNSAs) and their increasing levels of interaction and cooperation. Readers familiar with concepts such as 4th and 5th generation warfare, the transformation of war, 3rd generation gangs, dark globalization, postmodern (decentralized) organizations, virtual interaction in Second Life, and P2P transactions and Bitcoin will feel very comfortable with this book. The work itself is divided into a preface, an author biography, ten chapters, a very useful glossary, an appendix list of foreign terrorist operations (Department of State), and an index. The individual chapters progress logically and are as follows: 1) A Poisonous Brew; 2) Transnational Organized Crime: The Dark Side of Globalization; 3) Postmodern Terrorist Groups; 4) Domestic Terrorism and the Homegrown Threat; 5) Drug-Trafficking Organizations Go Global; 6) Traditional Terrorist and Criminal Financing Methods: Adapting for Success; 7) Terrorists and Criminal Exploitation on E-commerce: Following the Money Just Got Tougher; 8) Exploitation of Social Networking and the Internet; 9) Sharing Tactics; and 10) Conclusions about the Nexus and Thoughts on Resiliency and the Way Forward. Each chapter has a well articulated subsection breakdown as one would expect for training products and less theoretical textbooks.

As a reviewer, I very much enjoyed the chapters of the work on terrorist and criminal traditional financing methods (Ch. 6) and on terrorist and criminal exploitation of E-commerce (Ch. 7). They provided a nice contrast between the old and the new methods of raising, storing, and moving wealth via the illicit (dark) economy. Also, the inclusion of 'drug cartels' in the book – and considered by Hesterman distinct from organized criminals – was of great interest. Her characterization of drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) as more than just organized criminals – typically defined as seeking only a symbiotic and apolitical relationship with a state – is in line with my own writings and those of some other defense scholars. Her short section on the Zetas as a special concern (pp. 141-149) is warranted. Also, characterizing Al Qaeda and its affiliates and Hezbollah as postmodern terrorist groups highlights her progressive thinking. Such terrorist organizations have indeed exited the modern paradigm and, rather than simply looking for a traditional state to call their own, have visions of creating Islamic states that are a blending of both pre and post modern orientations.

Only a few very minor detractions from the book can be found. The first is the choice of the word 'alliance' in the subtitle. That term denotes a much stronger commitment between the various VNSAs discussed in the work than actually exists. Terms such as 'networks' or 'linkages' might be more descriptive as criminal and terrorist group dynamics are constantly changing and these groups, while readily able to work together for mutual benefit, have no qualms about turning on each other for the sake of profit, the elimination of competition, or due to the personal whim of their leaders stemming from a perceived slight or act of disrespect. Secondly, some confusion over the citation of Hesterman's 2004 paper exists. In one section of the work, for example, it is identified as her first book on this topic published in 1995 (p. 8) both of which appear to be inaccurate.

In summation, the work is ideal for law enforcement, military, governmental, and security personnel who have homeland security, organized crime, narcotics, and terrorism investigative, mitigation, and response duties – primarily for those with a U.S. focus of interest. From an e-IR utility perspective, the work's value is a little bit more mixed. It would work well in introductory courses on terrorist and criminal interactions at the undergraduate level and possibly as an initial primer – along with other works and journal articles – in some graduate level courses but cannot be considered a peer reviewed scholarly work with the requisite level of citation or topical specialization. The nexus relating to the dark criminal networks described by the author is summed up in Hesterman's conclusion in what can be considered thirteen lessons learned, essentially practical take aways for further study, discussion, and one would hope, counter-VNSA strategies development.

For that reason and the fact that the author mainly integrates and highlights research produced by Frank Cilluffo, Martin van Creveld, Louise Shelley, and other writers, rather than promoting new research, the book does not add significantly to the 'theoretical literature' on VNSA interaction and blending. Rather, Hesterman has done a great job of threat awareness integration and then explaining such a threat environment to non-academic specialists. She has produced a much-needed 'gray area' work that straddles the line between that of training and educational textbook needs, befitting one with her own extensive operational command and academic experiences. At \$69.95 the book (even with a hard cover) is a bit pricey but it is over 300 pages in length. The eBook version at \$48.00 can help make it more moderately priced.

Robert J. Bunker is a Distinguished Visiting Professor and Minerva Chair, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College and adjunct faculty, School of Politics and Economics, Claremont Graduate University. All views are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

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