Coventry University

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

The Convergence of Terrorism and Organised Crime: An Examination of Hezbollah's Activities in Latin America from a Crime-Terror Nexus Perspective

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Award date:
2023

Awarding institution:
Coventry University

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The Convergence of Terrorism and Organised Crime: An Examination of Hezbollah's Activities in Latin America from a Crime-Terror Nexus Perspective

Adriana Marin

PhD

September 2022

The Convergence of Terrorism and Organised Crime: An Examination of Hezbollah's Activities in Latin America from a Crime-Terror Nexus Perspective

By

Adriana Marin

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the University's requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

September 2022

Certificate of Ethical Approval

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This is to certify that the above named applicant has completed the Coventry University Ethical Approval process and their project has been confirmed and approved as High Risk

Date of approval:	15 Feb 2021
Project Reference Number:	P115571

Abstract

Although crime and terrorism are not new phenomena, the nexus between the two has raised concerns in the last decades. Since the end of the Cold War and the subsequent decline in state sponsorship of terrorism, the convergence of terrorist and organised criminal groups has been a method of producing revenue and maintaining support for terrorist causes. After the end of the Cold War, the increasing number of weak and failed states, along with the developments within the communication and technological world, changed the nature of these relations, as the crime-terror nexus became a growing threat to the international community.

In light of growing interest in the crime-terror nexus, this thesis utilises this concept to understand the relationship between state-sponsored terrorist organisations and organised criminal groups, focusing on Hezbollah's activities in the Tri-Border Area of Latin America. Since its inception, Hezbollah has been supported by the Islamic Republic of Iran. Nevertheless, over the years, due to the impact of sanctions imposed by the international community, Iran has reduced its funding capabilities, and as a result, Hezbollah has expanded its criminal enterprises. By assessing Hezbollah's involvement in a crime-terror nexus from a necessity versus opportunity perspective, this thesis argues that Hezbollah has encountered greater restrictions to access the economic resources it needs, which has justified its collaboration with criminal organisations. The Tri-Border Area allows Hezbollah to engage in criminal entrepreneurship due to certain characteristics that deem the area "a black hole". Therefore, using Hezbollah in the Tri-Border Area as a case study, this thesis presents an extension of the "black hole syndrome" and argues that this can develop outside of fragile or failed states and that there are certain characteristics that can deem any area "a black hole" where the crime-terror nexus can successfully develop. Using qualitative data gathered from primary sources, this thesis explores the underlying incentives that drive state-sponsored terrorist organisations into a crime-terror nexus, as well as the conditions that enable the crime-terror nexus to develop and flourish.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my family – thank you for your unconditional love and support.

To my auntie and uncle for always encouraging me to believe in myself.

And to Issam – Thank you for being my rock and for loving me.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following people, without whom I would not have been able to complete this research.

I am incredibly grateful to my supervision team, Professor David McIlhatton, Professor Rachel Monaghan, and Dr David Curran, for their thoughtful comments and recommendations on this thesis. This project would not have been possible without your unwavering guidance and support. I would like to extend my gratitude not just for your academic insight but also for your constant support and understanding while I was experiencing some difficult personal times.

I am also exceptionally grateful to my research participants for giving up their time and agreeing to share their experiences with me during a global pandemic, enabling this thesis to be possible. Completing this project would not have been possible without their invaluable insights.

Finally, to my family and friends who endured this long process with me - thank you for giving me so much love and support over the last three years and for your profound belief in my abilities.

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

Throughout time, organised crime and terrorism were regarded as two separate phenomena, with diverging interests, objectives, and philosophies (Wang, 2010; Makarenko, 2004). During the Cold War 1947 - 1991, little concern was given to the crime-terror nexus, as it was considered to be exclusively related to the narco-terrorist relationship between insurgent groups in Latin America and the drug cartels operating in the region (Makarenko, 2004). However, the end of the Cold War created conditions where the use of crime has become an important factor in the evolution of terrorism, which facilitated the development of terrorist groups and criminal organisations into international entities (Wang, 2010). Since the 1990s, the international community developed many initiatives aimed to target, disrupt, and dismantle their operational and financing activities but despite all these, the end of the Cold War provided a series of facilitators that consolidated the crime-terror nexus (Makareno, 2004; Wang, 2010). As Bovenkerk and Chakra (2005, p.6) point out, “the end of the Cold War meant in many cases an end to the sponsoring of terrorist organisations by states from some actors in the two power blocks”. Moreover, the post-Cold War era after the 1991 fall of the Soviet Union brought massive developments in information and communication technologies, which facilitated the convergence of both groups. The post-Cold War environment also offered access to global markets, a large pool of diaspora communities, as well as weak and fragile states affected by civil war characterised by the lack of the rule of law and ineffective justice systems, corruption and impunity as well as porous borders which provided safe-havens within which the crime-terror nexus developed rapidly (Makarenko, 2004; Roth & Sever, 2007).

In simple terms, the crime-terror nexus describes the relationship between terrorism and organised crime, and it refers to the use of crime by terrorist organisations as a source of revenue (Makarenko, 2004). However, there have been different concerns about the existence of this nexus. Disagreements have been expressed in the literature as to why terrorists and criminals cooperate and under what conditions these partnerships develop, which caused some scholars to argue that the interaction between terrorism and crime is overstated (Williams, 2008; Hübschle, 2011; Ruggiero, 2019). For example, Marc Galeotti (cited in Schmid, 2003, p. 14)

points out that “fears of international alliances between terrorists and criminals have proven to be exaggerated”; a view reinforced by the fact that since 2001, the debates around terrorism and organised crime have focused mainly on the former and neglected the latter. On the other hand, scholars argue that high consideration should be given to the developing nexus between international terrorism and transnational organised crime (Makarenko, 2004; Meierrieks & Schneider, 2016) and that the two phenomena “can no longer be studied in isolation” (Schori-Liang, 2011, p.2). These two entities interact in various ways as terrorist organisations are believed to be increasingly engaged in criminal activities such as drug smuggling and trafficking (Makarenko, 2002; Del Cid Gomez, 2010; the United States Drug Enforcement Agency, 2016), extortion (Wang, 2010; Reitano et al., 2017) human trafficking (Rollins et al., 2010; Reitano et al., 2017), arms smuggling (Martin & Romano, 1992; Schori-Liang, 2011) and money laundering (Wang, 2010; Ottolenghi, 2019a) with the aim of acquiring financial revenues to achieve their political objectives (Meierrieks & Schneider, 2016).

Many examples of the crime-terror nexus exist in the literature base, and research has demonstrated that such a nexus is essential for developing and furthering organised criminality and terrorism. Examples such as the nexus between the Albanian mafia and the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) during the Kosovo conflict highlights that a very profitable relationship had developed between the KLA and the Albanian criminal groups involving the trade in narcotics and weapons (Chossudovsky, 1999). This nexus “provided a well-oiled arrangement: the profits from the Pristina cartel, estimated to be in the ‘high tens of millions’, were funnelled to the KLA, where they were used primarily to buy weapons, often in ‘drugs-for-arms’ arrangements” (Makarenko, 2004, p. 132).

The Central Asian criminal network is another example that shows the existence of the crime-terror nexus between organised criminal groups and terrorist organisations such as the Taliban (Wang, 2010). The drug mafias act as the first line of buyers in the international drug trade; they supply organised criminal groups with large quantities of drugs that are being transported to different parts of the world, assisted by the Taliban (Makarenko, 2002). The Taliban enable the trafficking of opioids in Afghanistan while using the revenues to finance their activities (Makarenko,

2002). In this case, the crime-terror nexus facilitates the development of a criminal realm that dominates the global supply of illicit opium (Wang, 2010).

Schori-Liang (2011) points out that the crime-terror nexus enables organisations to function within both realms. Her research highlights that as terrorists benefit from the profits of criminal activities, organised criminal groups, either directly or indirectly engaged with terrorist organisations, share tactics and acquire assistance with their criminal enterprises (Schiori-Liang, 2011). For example, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) had established a profitable relationship as a report by Curtis and Karacan (2002, p. 21) states that the FARC has paid PIRA $2 million obtained from narcotics operations for training in arms and explosives, as well as exchanging information on bomb-making technology. Likewise, PIRA had established partnerships with Eastern European human traffickers, sharing smuggling routes and assisting their criminal activities while acquiring financial profits (Byrne, 2010). As Levitt and Jacobson (2008, pp. 9-10) point out, crime represents “a deep financial well from which terrorism can draw”.

Another interesting example of the crime-terror nexus refers to the inter-relationship between loyalist paramilitary groups such as the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) and Ulster Defence Association (UDA) and how they funded their armed campaign (Silke, 1998, 2000; Horgan & Taylor, 1999; 2003). Research shows that the crime-terror nexus has manifested for decades in Northern Ireland, as paramilitary groups are ‘heavily engaged’ and ‘actively involved’ in organised crime for the financing of loyalist terrorism (Silke, 1998; 2000; Horgan & Taylor, 1999; 2003; OCTF, 2013, p. 27; OCTF, 2018, p. 50). Evidence shows that loyalist paramilitary groups are engaged in armed robbery, extortion, money laundering, drug trade, burglary, insurance fraud, counterfeit currency, as well as intimidation and extortion (OCTF, 2013; 2018). In a Belfast Telegraph article, Assistant Chief Constable Drew Harris pointed out that “The UVF very clearly have involvement in drug dealing, all forms of gangsterism, serious assaults, intimidation of the community” (McGrath, 2013). Similarly, UDA members are extensively involved in organised crime, including drug trafficking, robbery, extortion, smuggling, and distributing counterfeit goods to finance their campaigns (PSNI, 2015).

As the examples above suggest, the crime-terror nexus poses a substantial and mounting threat to both national and international security, having dangerous effects on public safety and security, undermining the rule of law in societies, and causing economic insecurity across the globe (Schori-Liang, 2011; National Security Council, 2017). The crime-terror nexus is expanding, and the entities involved in it are diversifying their activities, resulting in the convergence of once distinct threats, which today have massive adverse effects (Makarenko, 2004; Wang, 2010; Shori-Liang, 2011; Felbab-Brown, 2011). These effects are primarily seen in developing countries where the rule of law is weak and is susceptible to a crime-terror nexus penetration (National Security Council, 2017). This results in the weakening of governance and the corruption of the political systems, which in turn provide avenues for criminal and terrorist organisations to leverage worldwide profitable illegal partnerships (Felbab-Brown, 2011). Illicit economies, as well as terrorist threats, have detrimental effects on law enforcement agencies and the judicial systems. As the crime-terror nexus grows, the law enforcement agencies' capacities diminish, which undermines the law's deterrence effects and the law enforcement agencies credibility and accountability, mainly because the nexus fosters corruption and impunity (Felbab-Brown, 2011). Moreover, the crime-terror nexus provides opportunities for the organised crime groups to expand their markets, while terrorist groups gather financial revenues that can be used towards their political goals (Shelley, 2018).

Nevertheless, one aspect of terrorism that has received less attention in the scholarly discourse is that of state-sponsored terrorist organisations and their involvement in organised crime. Hoffman (1998, p. 23) defines state-sponsorship as "the active and often clandestine support, encouragement and assistance provided by a foreign government to a terrorist group." Byman (2005, p. 10) explains the concept as "a government's intentional assistance to a terrorist group to help it use violence, bolster its political activities, or sustain the organisation". Hence, it can be argued that state sponsorship refers to the intentional support for terrorism, whether in the form of extensive financial support, ignoring terrorist activities, or offering a haven to those carrying out terrorist acts (Byman, 2005b). The concept of state sponsorship is further explored in Chapter Two. State-sponsored terrorism was significantly used during the Cold War as the two superpowers – the United States and Russia – used proxies to

secure their geopolitical hegemony and economic and security interests (Giraldo & Trinkunas, 2007).

On the one hand, the support provided by the Soviet Union to terrorist organisations was one of Moscow's tactics against the West, aimed at rendering the USSR and communism as the vanguard of "liberation" against Western colonialist oppression (Durns, 2017). The Soviets provided funds, training, equipment, and "networking" opportunities to numerous terrorist cells, including The Red Army Faction and the 2nd June Movement in West Germany, as well as the Red Brigades in Italy, terrorist organisations who shared their hatred for America (Lockwood, 2011). On the other hand, the United States (US) aimed to contain Soviet imperialism. It used terrorist organisations to remove old regimes and establish political and economic relations that ensured the United States' hegemony (Herman, 1987). The most prominent example is Operation Condor – an organised programme in which the US sponsored various campaigns of political suppression and state terror involving assassinations of political rivals across South America and beyond (Goñi, 2016). However, the phenomenon of state sponsorship declined with the end of the Cold War (Makarenko, 2004; Byman, 2005b; Wang, 2010; Giraldo & Trinkunas, 2007).

While the focus on terrorism skyrocketed, particularly after the 9/11 attacks, both research and policy focused on the non-state nature of terrorist organisations and dismissed state-sponsored terrorism as "unimportant" or "old think" (Byman, 2005a). However, state sponsorship did not stop with the end of the Cold War (Lockwood, 2011). For example, years after the Cold War, Iraq provided safe haven and financial support to Palestinian terror groups such as Hamas, the Islamic Jihad, the Palestine Liberation Front, and the Arab Liberation Front, intending to uphold the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and advance Iraq's political agenda (Council of Foreign Relations, 2005; Byman, 2003). In this case, state sponsorship became an indicator of state power as Iraq financially supported the recruiting, training, and resourcing of terrorists to achieve its political ends (Woods & Lacey, 2007). The support of the Iraqi regime for Palestinian terrorist organisations is well documented in Iraqi government papers that show, for example, the financial support the Iraqi government provided to families of suicide bombers in Gaza and the West Bank (Woods & Lacey, 2007).

Similarly, Libya was also designated as a state sponsor of terrorism (Schwartz, 2007). Under Colonel Gaddafi, Libya was the most prominent African state sponsoring terrorism and offering support to any terrorist group sharing anti-Israeli or anti-American beliefs (Pienaar, 2008). For example, the Libyan government supported international terrorist groups such as PIRA and the Palestine Liberation Front (Pienaar, 2008). Gaddafi's support for terrorism included but was not limited to financing terrorist operations, weapons trade, and the use of Libyan diplomatic facilities as support bases for terrorist organisations (Pienaar, 2008). Historically, state-sponsored terrorism was regarded as a "cost-effective means of waging war covertly … and, if executed properly [a] potentially risk-free means of anonymously attacking stronger enemies" (Hoffman, 1998, p. 186).

However, research has demonstrated that although open and active state sponsorship is a rare phenomenon in this day and age, state sponsorship remains a powerful tool for terrorist organisations, as the steady and constant financial assistance empowers them to adopt long-term strategies for achieving their political goals (Byman, 2005b; DeVore, 2012). For example, Hezbollah is one of the few terrorist organisations active today that continues to receive state sponsorship and maintains very close relations to its state sponsor (Byman, 2005b; Khan & Zhaoying, 2020; Levitt, 2021). However, the relationship between a state-sponsored terrorist organisation and its involvement in organised crime is an under-explored area of literature. Although the existing body of knowledge considers the use of criminal profits as an alternative to state sponsorship, Hezbollah is an example of a state-sponsored organisation that engages in organised crime despite receiving state support (Shaw, 2019).

Founded in the 1980s as a resistance movement to the Israeli occupation of Lebanon, Hezbollah was the leading terrorist organisation responsible for the highest number of American deaths before the 9/11 attacks (Kleck, 2011). The Islamic Republic of Iran has sponsored its activities in a relationship described as "the most robust relationship between a state and a designated terrorist group in history" (Byman, 2008b, p. 172). Although the state officials will not openly recognise the sponsoring of terrorism, Iran's support for Hezbollah is well documented (Levitt, 2005b; Levitt & Jacobson, 2008; Byman, 2008a; Katulis, 2018; Malakoutikhah, 2018).

It can be argued that for over three decades, Iran has been providing financial, military, intelligence and advisory support to Hezbollah, and it has also insulated the terrorist group from the full force of international counter-terrorism measures (Byman, 2008b; DeVore, 2012; Shaw, 2019). However, Iran's support for Hezbollah became problematic over time for the international community, and hence the sanctions imposed entail a variety of economic restrictions on Iran, aiming to weaken its financial capabilities to support Hezbollah (Malakoutikhah, 2018). These sanctions were based on the concept that if Iranian financial support for the Hezbollah can be disrupted, then the organisation could no longer continue its activities, resulting in its collapse (Philippone, 2008). Research argues that this hypothesis was very well understood by Hezbollah, which diversified its networks and became one of the most well-funded terrorist organisations in the world, also involved in organised criminal activities (Philippone, 2008). With the Islamic Republic of Iran undergoing devastating economic sanctions, the international community made Hezbollah cautious of relying too heavily on its sponsor and forced the organisation to explore new potential funding avenues. These new approaches have relied heavily on strategies traditionally used by organised criminal groups to "plug that gap", including illegal activities such as drug and weapons trafficking, money laundering, and many more (Constanza, 2012; Levitt, 2013; Levitt, 2016). Throughout the literature, there is strong evidence of Hezbollah establishing a solid base in Latin America, being significantly involved in money laundering operations and drug trafficking in the Tri-Border Area (TBA) between Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay (Ottolenghi, 2018). Indeed, the literature shows that Hezbollah gains significant revenues from its illicit activities in the TBA, in addition to the financial support it receives from the Islamic Republic of Iran (Ottolenghi, 2018).

In January 2018, a Forbes article portrayed Hezbollah as "the richest terror organisation" with an estimated annual income of over $1.1 billion (Zehorai, 2018). Although efforts have been made to combat this, these have been hampered by the support and cooperation that Latin American governments provide to Hezbollah. Previously, Latin American governments refused to label Hezbollah a terrorist organisation and publicly denied that it engages in illicit finance activities in their countries (Noriega & Cardenas, 2011; Ottolenghi, 2019a). This support allowed the organisation to establish multiple bases of operations while adapting to changing security patterns and maintaining relationships with regional organised criminal groups

(Keshavarz, 2016). Azani (2013) suggests that Hezbollah is no longer a regional terrorist organisation but rather a hybrid crime-terror group with a global reach. This enables access to multiple criminal networks and provides ample opportunities for profit, which has created new challenges for the law enforcement agencies in the region.

The crime-terror nexus that has developed between organised crime and terrorism elucidates the impression that it is in the interest of both criminal and terrorist groups to form alliances that ensure a favourable environment that can secure their operations. For organised criminal groups operating in Latin America, Hezbollah provides a network of opportunities, which allows them to expand their illicit markets without having to build a criminal infrastructure outside of Latin America. In particular, the nexus provides criminal organisations with various international channels to distribute their illegal commodities and gather profits through complex money-laundering schemes (Ottolenghi, 2019a). The scale of these partnerships has ensured that Hezbollah continues to flourish and acquire the necessary funds to follow its political agenda. On the other side, the growing nexus between terrorism and organised crime is weakening democratic institutions and compromising governments as terrorist organisations seek out officials vulnerable to corruption who can facilitate illicit activities (Realuyo, 2017). This allows them to operate with impunity, while damaging the credibility of the legal apparatuses and infiltrating formal economies, leading to increased crime and security challenges (Shelley, 2018).

Considering the subject of this thesis, the rationale and originality of this research is fivefold. Firstly, from a comprehensive review of the literature, it is evident that there is a substantial body of work on the crime-terror nexus. The focus of the research presented in this thesis is, however, positioned towards an under-researched component of this nexus, specifically the involvement of state-sponsored terrorist organisations in organised criminal activities. Particular attention centres on understanding how these terror-crime linkages form. Second, several questions remained unanswered in the literature about the driving factors behind these linkages and the motivations of the parties involved (King, 2011; Levitt, 2013). This research addresses these questions by examining the factors that lead to a state-sponsored terrorist organisation’s decision to engage in a crime-terror nexus. Third, most existing

research on the crime-terror nexus has been based on the general relationship between terrorism and organised crime; however, this study offers a specific case study considering the nature of Hezbollah's presence in Latin America, with a focus on the TBA. This area of research is particularly relevant due to the characterisation of Hezbollah as a state-sponsored terrorist organisation, which receives considerable funds from its sponsor, the Islamic Republic of Iran. This study fills a gap in the existing research on the crime-terror nexus by examining why a state-sponsored terrorist organisation decides to engage in a crime-terror nexus in a specific region across the globe - the Tri-Border Area of Latin America, and the factors that render that region a unique place that allows the crime-terror nexus to develop. Over the years, the TBA between Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay was regarded as a "terrorist safe haven" by the US Department of State (2006; 2010), and although it has escaped the focus of analysis on the region's connection with terrorism, it remained one of the "regional nodes for money laundering and [is] vulnerable to terrorist financing" (US Department of State, 2018, p. 195).

This study helps to develop a new perspective on the existing body of knowledge related to the crime-terror nexus, as it focuses on an original, in-depth analysis of the driving factors that influence the decision-making process of a state-sponsored terrorist organisation to engage in a crime-terror nexus. From an academic perspective, this study adds value to the body of literature related to the nature of Hezbollah's presence in Latin America and, more specifically, what makes the TBA a region where the crime-terror nexus can develop and flourish. Finally, this study aims to assist scholars in conducting future research regarding similar phenomena by applying the methods utilised in this thesis to examine the possible motivations of other terrorist groups that engage in a crime-terror nexus and identify the potential areas where these interactions are more likely to occur. A better understanding of the crime-terror nexus will allow the formulation of effective security strategies for these converging threats.

1.2 Aims and Objectives

This research aims to examine the factors that have led to the convergence of organised criminal groups and terrorist organisations, specifically focusing on Hezbollah in Latin America.

To deliver on this aim, a series of interlinked objectives are utilised. These include:

1. To understand and critically assess the factors that drive the crime-terror nexus concerning state-sponsored terrorist organisations;
2. To investigate the specificities of Hezbollah and to examine why the TBA facilitates the formation of the crime-terror nexus;
3. To investigate the decision-making process behind Hezbollah's operations in the TBA and evaluate their involvement in organised criminal activities;
4. To explore the factors hindering countermeasures against the crime-terror nexus in the TBA.

This qualitative study addresses the following four research questions:

RQ 1: What factors appear to prompt the formation of the crime-terror nexus in the TBA?

RQ 2: What are the potential drivers of criminality behind Hezbollah's involvement in organised crime in the TBA?

RQ 3: What organised criminal activities does Hezbollah engage in, in the TBA?

RQ 4: What are the key informants' perceptions of the initiatives designed to tackle the crime-terror nexus in the TBA?

These research questions anchor the research process and drive the achievement of the overall study objectives.

1.3 Research Methodology

As this study seeks to understand the potential enablers of Hezbollah's activities, particularly those within Latin America, this study applies a qualitative framework to achieve this. Qualitative research has been deemed to be the most appropriate methodological approach to "make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p.3). Indeed, it is concerned with analysing the subjective meaning and the social production of issues. It, therefore, stresses the importance of examining how individuals make sense of world phenomena, providing the opportunity for complex issues to be easily understood. As Mason (2002, p. 1) points out:

> Through qualitative research, we can explore a wide array of dimensions of the social world, including the texture and weave of everyday life, the understandings, experiences and imaginings of our research participants, the ways that social processes, institutions, discourses or relationships work, and the significance of the meanings they generate.

This study uses primary and secondary data to gather sufficient information to explore the crime-terror nexus concerning state-sponsored terrorist organisations. By doing this, the researcher identified a variety of perspectives on the topic by employing a rigorous analysis of the secondary data, which then framed the research within theoretical constructs by using primary data as a form of enquiry to understand the crime-terror nexus with a particular focus on the involvement of a state-sponsored terrorist organisation in criminal activities.

To provide a better analysis of the data, content analysis is used to analyse the information gathered from secondary sources (books, journal articles, newspaper articles, etc. which were selected purposefully, based on whether or not they are suitable to answer the research questions addressed in this study). Kumar (2011, p. 278) points out the importance of content analysis for scrutinising the results, while applying this technique helps highlight the main themes and patterns that emerge from the literature.

Thematic analysis is another method deployed for the analysis of the primary data. Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method used across a wide range of epistemologies and research questions. This method supports the researcher in identifying, analysing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes found within a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Therefore, it is a valuable technique for examining the standpoints of various research participants, underlining the similarities and differences between their perspectives, and generating original insights. Thematic analysis is also helpful in encapsulating key features of a large data set, as it encourages the researcher to take a well-structured approach to handling data, in order to produce a clear and organised final article. Building on both analytical tools facilitates the alignment of the research methodology to the research aim and objectives.

1.3.1 Literature Review

A literature review is an essential academic requirement that helps to place the research into a wider context through evidence-based and in-depth analysis of the topic. A literature review is an unbiased, systematic and critical examination of the relevant available literature on the topic being researched (Hart, 1998). In this case, a literature review identified the sources particularly relevant in relation to the crime-terror nexus, as well as the involvement of state-sponsored terrorist groups in organised crime. This demonstrates how the research fits within the larger crime-nexus debate and sets the foundations for the research design process and the requirements for the primary research to be conducted. This research is based on an integrative literature review that critically analysed and synthesised the literature on the crime-terror nexus in a way such that it exposed the gaps in the current knowledge that this research aimed to address (Wisker, 2007). The literature review helps the researcher engage in a dialogue with what has been previously investigated and contextualises this particular research (Wisker, 2007). The body of literature included studies that address the involvement of a state-sponsored terrorist organisation in the crime-terror nexus, with a specific focus on Hezbollah in Latin America. For this literature review, the materials used were prioritised as follows:

1. Articles in international peer-reviewed journals
2. Books/ Chapters in edited books
3. Articles in national peer-reviewed journals
4. Conference papers and reports from government or professional organisations
5. PhD dissertations and Master's thesis
6. Websites/articles in non-refereed journals

In this study, the literature review serves three purposes. First, it provides a theoretical foundation for this study and substantiates the presence of the research problem. Second, it justifies the research contributions to the existing knowledge and helps maintain a sense of perspective throughout the research. Finally, it validates the methods utilised for this particular study and informs the critical analysis of the meaning behind the data collected during the analysis stages of the research (Hart, 1998; Levy & Ellis, 2006; Wisker, 2007).

The purpose of the literature review was to ground this research in theory, to identify the academic gap, and to act as a guide when drafting the interview questions and analysing the data (Bryman, 2001). For the purpose of this research, a review of the literature was a precondition for doing thorough and substantive research, as this helped to advance the understanding of what is already known in relation to the crime-terror nexus and how the research fits into this wider context (Jesson & Lacey, 2006). To provide a better analysis of the data, the researcher conducted a review of information gathered from secondary sources - books, journal articles, conference papers, government and law enforcement reports - which were selected purposefully, based on whether or not they were suitable to answer the research questions addressed in this study. Supplementing these books and journal articles, the researcher also included contemporary newspaper articles. The inclusion criteria of an article that had to be present in order for it to be eligible for inclusion in a literature review included terms such as “crime terror nexus”, “crime terror relationship”, “crime terror continuum”, “organised crime”, “terrorism”, “state sponsored terrorism”, “Hezbollah”, “Tri border area”, etc. The articles needed to be peer-reviewed, written in English or Spanish. A review of the articles’ abstract was imperative to ensure that they were centred on the outcome of interest for this thesis. The literature review excluded non peer-review articles, conference abstracts, and those articles which were not compliant with the combination of key words. Those articles with full text unavailable or inaccessible were also excluded from this research.

1.3.2 Qualitative research

Creswell (1998, p. 15) defines qualitative research as “an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct and methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or a human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants and conducts the study in a natural setting”. For this research, a case study approach was deemed to be the most suitable methodology. This method is defined by Yin (1984, p. 23) “as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used”.

Research shows that qualitative methodologies are associated with particular philosophical standpoints, which guide the research process (Noaks & Wincup, 2004). A case study approach, however, "is not assigned to a fixed ontological, epistemological or methodological position" (Rosenberg & Yates, 2007, p. 447) and this allows the researcher to adopt the standpoint which is deemed to be appropriate for the study and which can be tailored to the complexity of the research problem (Yin, 2014). However, Stake (2006) points out that the researcher's interpretive standpoint is crucial for the knowledge production process within a case study approach. This approach views reality as multiple and subjective, based on meanings and understanding (Stake, 2006). Hence, for this thesis, the researcher engages in inductive research, exploring the underlying implications of a phenomenon (Aliyu et al., 2014; Gopaldas, 2016). According to Yin (1984), this case study design is an adequate research method when the study aims to uncover the "how" and "why" a phenomenon occurs, and the researcher wants to cover the contextual conditions as they are relevant to the phenomenon researched (Polkinghorne, 2005). This thesis' main aim is to examine how the crime-terror nexus occurs, with particular emphasis on Hezbollah's presence in Latin America. In doing this, it investigates the decision-making of the state-sponsored terrorist organisation and the conditions that drive the crime-terror nexus in that particular region.

Using a case study approach has its advantages. First, the data was gathered and examined within the context and the situation within which the phenomena occur – in this case, the TBA of Latin America (Yin, 1984). Second, the qualitative research produced does not only help to explore the issue at hand but also helps to explain the underlying complexities of the crime-terror nexus, which could not have been captured through other methods. On the other hand, this approach has been criticised, as it is believed that it cannot provide a basis for generalisation as it focuses on a small number of cases (Yin, 1984). This method's main criticism is that it relies on the critical exploration of one single case, making it difficult to reach a generalising conclusion (Yin, 1984). However, this study focuses on Hezbollah's presence in the TBA as a state-sponsored terrorist organisation engaging in criminal activities. By looking at the underlying motivations behind the formation of the crime-terror nexus, as well as the reasons why the area is particularly permissive for the crime-terror nexus to occur, this

study can serve as a future template to examine existing opportunities and patterns of other terrorist groups that engage in a crime-terror to finance their terrorist activities.

In-depth semi-structured interviews were considered the most suitable research method for this particular study and were carried out for various reasons. In-depth interviews are characterised as personal and unstructured interviews, aiming to identify participants' opinions regarding the research subject. The main benefit of conducting personal interviews is that they include direct interaction between the researcher and the participants in the study, which eliminates non-response rates and allows the researcher to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon studied (Wilson, 2003). In terms of data collection tools, this research involves the use of a semi-structured interview, where some specific questions were prepared in line with the aims and objectives of this study, which helped the researcher guide the interview towards the accomplishment of the aims and objectives; however, additional questions were asked during the interviews which allowed the researcher to grasp a better understanding of the phenomena researched. The methodology of this research is further explained in Chapter Four.

1.4 Thesis Outline

This research revolves around four objectives and contains eight chapters. Chapter One provides the introduction to this thesis and presents an overview of the research problem, as well as the context and structure of this thesis (See Figure 1).

Chapter Two provides an analytical understanding of the concepts and definitions of terrorism by reflecting on the lack of agreement in terrorism definitions and how this poses difficulties for counter-terrorism measures. It offers a contextualisation of terrorism, and it provides an overview of the evolution of state-sponsored terrorism. This chapter assesses the relationship between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Hezbollah, mainly how state sponsorship influences the decision-making of the terrorist organisation, as well as the limitations of state sponsorship.

In Chapter Three, distinct definitions between terrorism and organised crime are compared and contrasted, as well as how the trajectories of crime and terrorism converge. This chapter theorises on the crime-terror nexus and how this occurs,

particularly emphasising the factors that facilitate collaborations between terrorist organisations and criminal groups. This chapter looks at the evolution of the crime-terror nexus and places particular emphasis on Hezbollah's activities in Latin America. The chapter examines the intersection of state-sponsored terrorism with organised crime and how the crime-terror nexus occurs within this context, emphasising Hezbollah and the rationality behind its involvement in the crime-terror nexus.

Chapter Four details the methodological framework utilised in this study, emphasizing the applicability of the chosen methods to achieve the aim and objectives of this study, including the collection, analysis and interpretation of the primary data. This chapter also outlines the ethical issues and considerations of the research due to the sensitive nature of the subject and the involvement of human participants.

Chapter Five places this research in the context of the TBA and provides an overview of Hezbollah's activities in the region, highlighting empirical material that examines the TBA's crime-terror nexus. This section provides evidence necessary to allow the reader to understand the context of the problem and how the crime-terror nexus occurs in the TBA, and also placing emphasis on the operations designed to counter the crime-terror nexus.

Chapter Six provides a comprehensive data analysis, identifying themes based on the research questions that guide this study. The data was divided into four themes and presented chronologically to relate these to the research questions accurately.

Chapter Seven brings together the findings of this study for a discussion on the research questions and objectives of this study. The discussion of findings relates these to other preceding work considered in Chapters 2 and 3 and highlights instances where they have supported or challenged the hypotheses made in the literature.

Chapter Eight concludes this thesis by drawing together the key findings of this research and serves as an overview of the study as a whole, placing the project within a broader context and highlighting its original contributions.

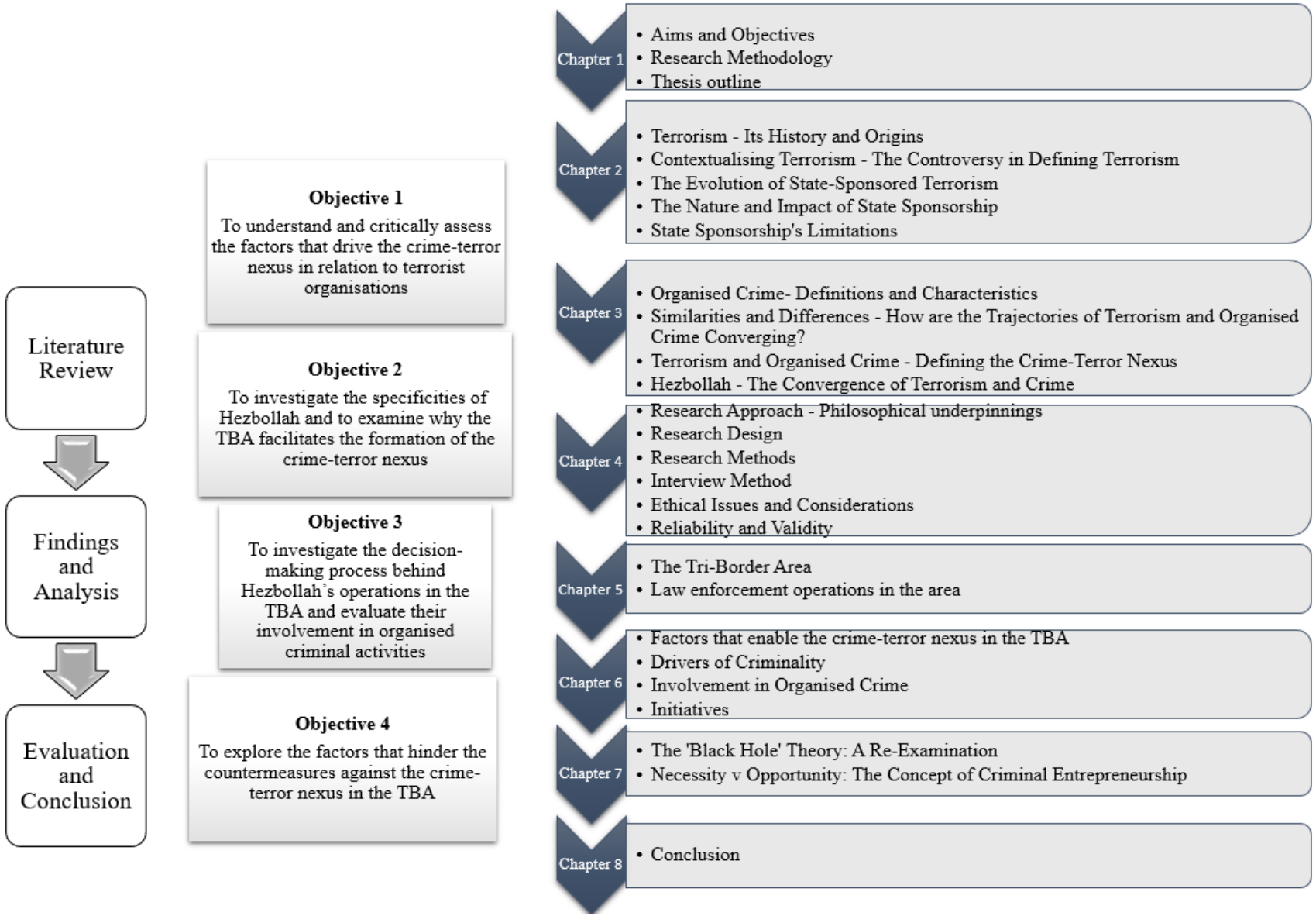

Figure 1.1: Research Structure Plan

CHAPTER 2: Terrorism and State-Sponsored Terrorism

2.1 Introduction

Terrorism impacts every aspect of modern life; therefore, it is crucial to try and explain how terrorism came to occupy such an important part in contemporary discourse. This chapter argues that this form of violence generates a vast amount of academic, political, legal and security debate. There are many different outlooks and perspectives in the discussion about terrorism, and each reflects different perspectives about contemporary society and politics. This chapter examines how scholars and experts have constructed terrorism as an object of knowledge and how this subject is shaped and moulded by power relations within the international realm.

Firstly, this chapter revisits the history of terrorism. Section 2.2 of this chapter looks at the origins of terrorism, examining terrorism's long and complex history from antiquity to the present day and argues that terror, considered a weapon of the weak against the strong, has been a warfare tactic for an extended period. Beginning with the Zealots of Antiquity, discussing the Assassins of the Middle Ages, and the Reign of Terror in Europe, this section offers an understanding of the beginning and transformative stages of terrorism, as well as the factors that have inspired the emergence of terror groups. Moreover, this section argues that the historical motivations of terrorism provide the key to understanding modern terrorism.

Secondly, this chapter questions various understandings of and approaches to terrorism, exploring the relationship between knowledge and power and how this shapes the understanding of this phenomenon. It addresses conceptual issues related to how terrorism is understood and defined and revisits the definitional debate on terrorism, looking at its primary characteristics and how these reflect the context within which a definition is designed (Section 2.3). This section argues that terrorism is a concept that defies a simple and straightforward agreed definition, a fact most evident from the voluminous literature that attempts to explain and define this notion. Terrorism has fluctuated in meaning, reflecting the context specific to the time, period and location it had been used. This chapter endeavours to comprehend terrorism from a vast range of different perspectives and branches of knowledge. Until the attacks of

9/11, terrorism was considered a politicised rather than a securitised matter (Buzan & Hansen, 2009; Peoples & Williams, 2014). While it was perceived as a danger, it was not extensively spoken of as a prevailing threat to international security (Buzan & Hansen, 2009). Since the 9/11 attacks, specialists securitised terrorism by expressing ideas that recognised terrorism as an existential threat to international security (Peoples & Williams, 2014). The events of 9/11 resulted in the development of a vast literature on terrorism and counter-terrorism; however, a standard definition seems unattainable because different governments have different explanations that suit their own purposes or biases (Schmid, 2011; Saul, 2012; Ramsay, 2015). This section compares and contrasts various definitions of terrorism and examines the failure of scholars, academics and policymakers to agree on a standard definition of the term. It argues that although there is common ground for the development of a comprehensive universal definition of what constitutes terrorism, this concept is interpreted in such a way to suit the interests of those who aim to define it.

This chapter goes on to argue that modern-day terrorism has direct involvement in political matters. Over time, terrorism has been successful in changing governmental policies, foreign policy measures, and manipulating politics, therefore, this has lured states into adopting terrorism as a means of affecting other governments' policies (Dingel, 2005; Norton, 2007; Fayazi, 2017; Chengu, 2020). This section argues that for many years, terrorism was regarded as a fight between two parties: on the one hand, a group of struggling individuals, and on the other, a sovereign state. However, over the years, various countries began to use terrorist organisations to promote their interests in the international realm. What was characterised as the "weapon of the weak", has become instead a tool for states to advance their political agenda (Manni, 2012; Shoemaker, 2015; Perliger, 2018).

Section 2.4 focuses on state sponsorship of terrorism and how this helps terrorist organisations to survive over time, as it remains a crucial aspect of terrorism (Manni, 2012; Byman, 2020). However, it is worth noting that the identity and nature of state sponsors of terrorism have changed considerably in recent years. This section defines state-sponsored terrorism and looks at its phases of evolution: the peak, intermediate, and low periods (Collins, 2014). It continues to discuss the

significant characteristics of state sponsorship and how these have changed over time (Wilkinson, 1984). This chapter also examines the nature of state sponsorship and what this entails - the costs and benefits of state sponsorship, as well as its impact on terrorist organisations and their decision-making process (Section 2.5). Using Byman and Kreps (2010) analysis of state-sponsored terrorism through the lens of Principal-Agent Analysis, this section provides a critical understanding of the reasons why states (principals) seek to delegate and support agents (terrorist organisations), with a particular emphasis on what the success of this relationship is based on. This chapter argues that groups who rely too heavily on their sponsor are more likely to be eliminated if the sponsor's commitment declines.

The last part of this chapter (Section 2.6) considers the factors that affect and limit state sponsorship, the impact this has on terrorist organisations, and the options available to ensure their survival – i.e. involvement in crime. By comparatively analysing the various definitions of terrorism and critically examining state sponsorship, its benefits and limitations, this chapter serves as a precursor to understanding the factors that drive the crime-terror nexus in relation to state-sponsored terrorist organisations, the first objective of this thesis.

2.2 Terrorism – Its History and Origins

Terrorism is a global phenomenon, which has profound consequences throughout the world. It is easy to give the impression that terrorism is quite a recent phenomenon, almost entirely dependent on globalisation (Zimmerman, 2011). Many contemporary studies of terrorism suggest that although it has always been a feature of social existence, it gained increasing importance in the 1960s when terrorist violence escalated and undertook new dimensions as an international phenomenon, constructing a new "mode of conflict" that has global implications (Sandler, Tshirhart & Cauley, 1983, p. 36; Jenkins, 1975; Rapoport, 1984). However, terrorism is not a new phenomenon. In some aspects, what modern society describes as terrorism is preceded by terrorist activity since the Roman Empire. However, terrorism has not remained a static phenomenon; but instead, it has extensively evolved although retaining some of the features that have historically characterised it.

While it is difficult to ascertain when it was first used, terrorism traces its roots in antiquity. The earliest known organisation that exhibited aspects similar to a contemporary terrorist organisation was the Jewish Zealots of the first century C.E. (Chaliand & Blin, 2007). Also known as *Sicarii*, the Zealots were reformers motivated by the idea that they could not remain faithful to the religion of Judaism while living under Roman rule (Jackson, 1997). Hence, they carried on a campaign of terrorist attacks, including selective and symbolic assassinations of Roman occupiers, destruction of the property of people in power, and kidnapping of individuals to extort the release of Zealots prisoners (Horsley, 1979).

Similarly, the Assassins – an 11th-century faction of a Shia Muslim sect known as the *Ismailis* – also adopted assassination as a tactic to fight the enemy. Rapoport (1984, p. 664) described them as a group that "seriously threatened the governments of several states". Like the Zealots, the Assassins were also targeting their victims, usually politicians or clerics who refused to adhere to the version of Islam they were forcibly disseminating. The attacks were carried out during the daytime, putting their life at risk, but at the same time instilling fear in their enemies and forwarding their political goals (Chaliand & Blin, 2007). The Assassins carried out their terror acts at religious sites on days of celebration, a tactic intended to broadcast their cause and incite others to follow; similar to contemporary terrorists, they regarded martyrdom as a guarantor that they would enter paradise (Rapoport, 1984). Even though these organisations operated in antiquity, their actions are relevant today, mainly as precursors of modern terrorists in terms of motivation, organisation, targeting, and goals (Rapoport, 1984). Modern terrorism has, in some aspects, completed a full circle, as many of its attacks are motivated by religious ideology and political motivations – something which drove their earliest predecessors (Zalman, 2020). Take, for instance, the example of the Lord's Resistance Army led by Joseph Kony in Uganda, a group that uses religion as a way to attract followers and justify their actions (Odhiambo, 2014). Issues such as corruption, religious struggles and ethnic conflicts created an opportunistic environment, which terrorists exploit. The Zealots and the Assassins were both organised groups motivated by a religious ideology yet using "politically conscious

strategy and deliberately calculated tactics", similar to modern-day terrorist groups (Horsley, 1979, p. 457). The belief that terrorism is a legitimate means to address such conditions and effect political change is by no means a new phenomenon. Still, it has become a contemporary important problem that enables terrorism to develop, grow and become more lethal.

From the time of the Assassins to the 1700s, terror was considered "the weapon of the weak", and colonised people widely used it as a weapon against foreign occupation (Horlsey, 1979; Alaimo & Tong, 2018). The authority that terrorism fights against did not exist until the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, which resulted in the rise of the modern nation-state (Croxton, 1999; Schmidt, 2001). However, with the triumph of state sovereignty and the beginning of collective security, nations acquired the necessary means to enforce their authority and suppress activities that resembled terrorist acts (Schmidt, 2001). The term "terrorism" was first used to describe Maximilien Robespierre's *Reign of Terror*, a period of the French Revolution in which the French state affirmed its authority by instilling fear over the general public through the execution of over 17,000 of its citizens (Murphy, 1989). The use of terror was associated with concepts such as virtue and democracy. Robespierre regarded this as vital in ensuring the survival of the French Republic, arguing in 1794 that "Terror is nothing other than justice, prompt, severe, inflexible; it is, therefore, an emanation of virtue; it is not so much a special principle as it is a consequence of the general principle of democracy applied to our country's most urgent needs" (cited in Halsall, 1997). Unlike contemporary acts of terrorism, the *Reign of terror* was the exact reverse: it denoted violence against people by the state. However, similar to modern terrorism, the use of terror was deliberate, organised and systematic, and its ultimate goal was to create "a new and better society" that could replace what is considered corrupt and undemocratic (Hoffman, 2006; 2017, p. 4). As Hendrix and Young (2014, p. 330) suggest, "terrorism, long considered a weapon of the weak, may now be more accurately characterised as a weapon targeting the weak".

Although terrorism is not a new phenomenon, it has developed considerably over the years while retaining some of the features that have historically defined it. When considering terrorism through a historical lens, one could claim that the goals,

ideology, and behaviour of terrorist organisations have substantially changed over the years. Rapoport (2001) considers this idea in his four-wave theoretical model of modern terrorism: anarchism, anti-colonialism, left-wing radicalism, and religious terrorism, each having particular characteristics. The first wave was characterised by an anarchist view in which the state was the source of evil, and through its eradication, a better society would rise (Rapoport, 2001). The idea quickly spread worldwide, with anarchist movements emerging in Western Europe, the United States (US), and even Japan and China (Kaplan, 2016). The first wave emerged with new technological developments that made travel and communication more accessible and in turn, made it easier for ideas to be shared across national boundaries (Alaimo & Tong, 2018). The second wave focused on eliminating colonial control and the local struggles against those in power, a characteristic shared with ancient terrorism (Rapoport, 2001). However, the term terrorism lost its utility in gathering the support of the people (Kaplan, 2016). In the third wave or the new-left wave, radical leftist alleged that capitalism was the cause of society's evils and that its eradication would lead to more equity for all people (Rapoport, 2001). This wave was characterised by an anti-American sentiment where the Soviet Union represented an image of peace, particularly during the Cold War (Kaplan, 2016). This allowed the Soviet Union to offer state sponsorship to various terrorist groups in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, who shared the anti-American sentiment (Giraldo & Trinkunas, 2007; Durns, 2017). It has been considered that since the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, terrorist groups based on religious motivation have risen, giving rise to the fourth wave of terrorism. Also identified as religious terrorism, the fourth wave is a contemporary wave where radical terrorist groups associate Western cultural values with secularism, materialism, globalisation, mass media, tolerance, and diversity (Rapoport, 2001). Islamic terrorist organisations believe that Western society denigrates the fundamentals of religion, family and community, regarding them as infidels who must be punished (Juergensmeyer, 2000; Alaimo & Tong, 2018). Similar to the Zealots and the Assassins, they identify themselves as the guardians of their sacred values, and they aim to protect those values and dignity (Juergensmeyer, 2000).

Although belonging to different times in history, similarities can be found in the four waves of terrorism. For terrorism to occur there must be a series of factors such as social upheaval and disagreements amongst ideologically incompatible groups, which serve as incentives for terrorist acts. Similar to the Zealots or the Assassins, throughout Rapoport's theory, terror is justified as a means of engagement in a moral struggle to restore the social order against a dominating ruling oppressor, which leads the society towards an abyss (de la Roche, 1996; Rapoport, 2001; Rosenfeld, 2004). Rapoport (2001) assumes that distinct iterations of terrorism can be distinguished throughout history, as the particular circumstances under which the underlying factors come into existence vary significantly from organisation to organisation, as well as time. Therefore, terrorism should not be regarded as an ideological perspective adopted by a particular organisation. Instead, it should be seen as an approach undertaken by a variety of groups that aim to advance their specific cause forward, whether it is social, political, or religious (Juergensmeyer, 2000; Schmid & Jongman, 2005; Laqueur, 2003; Mullins & Thurman, 2011).

However, Rapoport's (2001) classification has not been left uncriticised. While the notion of waves implies distinct iterations of terrorist violence compelled by successive historical trends, Parker and Sitter (2016) argue that terrorist groups draw on both contemporary and historical lessons in developing their contemporary tactics and strategies. Similarly, Duyvesteyn (2004, p. 445) noted, "more continuity than change can be argued to exist". Parker and Sitter (2016) suggest that there are no waves of terrorism but that instead, the fragile political climate in certain places around the world has provided the means, motive and opportunity to seek political change through violence, and this gave rise to terrorism, which underwent a profound change since the 1990s. Motivated by new ideologies and rationales, modern terrorism challenges the conventional beliefs about terrorism (Hoffman, 2006; 2017). Indeed, terrorism in the 21st century has evolved in terms of motivation, tactics as well as resources and capabilities (Hoffman, 2017). Throughout time, terrorism has been able to prevail due to globalisation, advances in information and communication technologies, free trade and finance practices (Czinkota et al., 2010; Zimmerman, 2011). Unlike their predecessors, modern terrorists became more fragmented,

unpredictable and operate worldwide, sharing their ideology through online websites and social media platforms, being physically disconnected from the headquarters of the organisation they are affiliated to (Hoffman, 2017). This scattering of terror transformed terrorism into a universal threat that has been thoroughly analysed by terrorism experts (Laqueur, 2003; Morgan, 2004; Sageman, 2008; Neuman, 2009; Hoffman, 2017).

2.3 Contextualising Terrorism – The Controversy in Defining Terrorism

It could be argued that terrorism is a phenomenon easy to identify, but it is very difficult to define (Schimd, 2011). Almost every scholarly article on terrorism includes a critical debate on the definitions of terrorism; however, there is minimal consensus on a clear and pertinent definition of this phenomenon (Prabha, 2000; Schimd, 2011). Over the years, academic disputes have suggested that the word "terrorism" is interpreted in such a way to suit the interests of those who aim to define it (Saul, 2007; Ramsay, 2015). Hence, numerous definitions of terrorism provided by academics, politicians and criminal justice practitioners brought multiple interpretations of the term and complicated the understanding of this phenomenon. Debated by governments, academics, the media, and even terrorists themselves, the vast array of definitions portrays a puzzling collection of approaches to defining terrorism. Cooper (2001, p. 881) points out that "there has never been, since the topic began to command serious attention, some golden age in which terrorism was easy to define".

Initially, terrorism was regarded as a violent action perpetrated by governments, particularly due to the French Revolution and Robespierre's *Reign of Terror* (Teichman, 1989); nowadays, it is considered – although not always - as a type of behaviour directed against governments (Teichman, 1989). In 1937, the League of Nations defined terrorism as criminal acts directed against a state (League of Nations, 1937, p. 6; Teichman, 1989). Terrorism itself became an international issue in 1934 after the assassination of French politician Jean-Louis Barthou and King Alexander of Yugoslavia, as the event encouraged the League of Nations to draft the Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of Terrorism (CPPT) (Maogoto, 2003). In 1937, the

CPPT defined terrorism as “criminal acts directed against a state and intended or calculated to create a state of terror in the minds of particular persons, or a group of persons or the general public” (League of Nations, 1937, p. 6). The main elements of this definition — the use or threat of violence i.e. “criminal acts […] intended or calculated”, in order to intimidate an undetermined number of persons, and to grasp some political or ideological goal i.e. “directed against a state”— have since been used in the great majority of attempts to describe terrorism. The Convention was the first penal instrument that declared terrorism an international offence. However, this agreement ceased to exist in recent times due to various disagreements over what constitutes an act of terrorism (Maogoto, 2003). This led to a high number of scholars seeking a satisfactory definition of terrorism, which has been described by Perry (2004) as the search for the “Holy Grail”. Easson and Schmid (2011) compiled more than 250 different academic and governmental definitions of terrorism in use worldwide, which proves that defining terrorism has been a controversial endeavour. From a policymaking perspective, a universally agreed definition of terrorism will facilitate international cooperation against this phenomenon, while from an academic perspective, scholars argue that there is a need to grasp a comprehensive understanding of what terrorism is. However, criminal justice practitioners and academics have “agreed to disagree upon” a definition of terrorism (Branna, Esler & Strindberg, 2001, p. 11). The lack of agreement is consistent as scholars and policymakers find themselves “entangled in a labyrinth of terminology” (Prabha, 2000, p. 125).

In 1976, Alexander (1976, p. 14) defined the term as “the use of violence against random civilian targets in order to intimidate or to create generalised pervasive fear for the purpose of achieving political goals”. He expanded on this definition years later, and describes terrorism as “the calculated employment or the threat of violence by individuals, sub national groups, and state actors to attain political, social, and economic objectives in the violation of law, intended to create an overwhelming fear in a target area greater than the victims attacked or threatened” (Alexander, 1999, p. 65). Similar to the definition provided by the Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of Terrorism, the calculated use or threat of violence in

order to intimidate their targets and to reach some political or ideological goal are regarded as characteristics of terrorism. Therefore, Alexander's definitions can be reduced to five essential structural elements:

1) The threat/use of violence;

2) The targeting of civilians;

3) The intent to cause violence;

4) For the purpose of causing fear, intimidating or threatening an adversary;

5) Aiming to achieve some political/ideological goal.

These characteristics can be found in many definitions of terrorism. However, Alexander's definitions lack an important characteristic of terrorism – the international aspect. Globalisation has facilitated the transnational character of terrorism, with features such as development in technology, free movement, and porous borders that have provided the means for terrorist organisations to pursue their agenda globally (Zimmerman, 2011; Mekaj & Aliaj, 2018). Terrorism, therefore, is a violent act termed as an economic, political attack on a foreign country (Schmid, 2011). Terrorist organisations have exploited the benefits of globalisation in a way to meet their goals and spread their ideology throughout the world. For example, a surge in the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria claimed attacks in Jakarta, Indonesia, suggests that the terrorist group successfully extended their influence to Asia (Mallet, 2016). As Neumann (2009, p. 20) points out, terrorism has become:

> "increasingly transnational in reach and orientation due to globalisation which facilitated the use of information and communication technologies as means of collaborations between various terrorists; in turn, they leave no clearly identifiable patterns, and are very hard to track down, making it extremely difficult for governments and law enforcement authorities to build accurate pictures of their scope of operations, membership, and sources of funding and to counter these effectively".

Laqueur (1987, p. 72) defines terrorism as “the use of covert violence by a group for political ends”. Hoffman (2017, p. 40) expands on this and addresses a shortcoming of Laqueur’s definition by pointing out that terrorism represents “the deliberate creation and exploitation of fear through violence or the threat of violence in the pursuit of political change”. He points out that terrorism is deliberately designed to instil fear not only in those against whom terrorist acts are targeted but also in the broader audience that could influence the political intentions they pursue (Hoffman, 2017). This argument is also sustained by Cooper (2001, p.883), who suggests that terrorism represents “the intentional generation of massive fear by human beings for the purpose of securing or maintaining control over other human beings”. In Cooper’s perspective, “terrorism is a naked struggle for power” (Cooper, 2001, p. 890). Cooper’s understanding of terrorism is similar to that of Rapoport’s (1984), as both scholars argue that terrorists seek to exploit their opponents’ weaknesses through the use of fear and intimidation.

Nonetheless, Jenkins (2003) corrects an omission in the aforementioned definitions by including social change as an objective of terrorism. He argues that terrorism represents calculated violence that creates fear “to terrorise, and thereby bring about some social or political change” (Jenkins, 2003, p.28). Although there are subtle distinctions in all definitions of terrorism, three characteristics can be seen across them. First, terrorism involves the use of violence, or the threat of using it. Second, there must be specific political motivations behind terrorist actions, and third – and probably the most definite characteristic – is the threat or intention to harm civilians and spread fear.

The United Nations (UN) Ad Hoc Committee on Terrorism, in its informal text of article 2 of the draft Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism, defined terrorism in the following way:

> Any person commits an offence within the meaning of this Convention if that person, by any means, unlawfully and intentionally, causes:

> (a) death or serious bodily injury to any person; or (b) serious damage to public or private property, including a place of public use, a state or government facility, a public transportation system, an infrastructure facility or the environment; or (c) damage to property, places, facilities, or systems referred to in paragraph 1 (b) of this article, resulting or likely to result in major economic loss, when the purpose of the conduct, by its nature or context, is to intimidate a population, or to compel a government or an international organisation to do or abstain from doing any act.

Arguably, this definition is broad as it does not offer details in terms of who is a terrorist or a victim, how terrorism is conducted and what actually constitutes a terrorist act (i.e. 'any person', 'any means', 'any act') (Schmid, 2016). Moreover, it avoids the term "political", hence discarding the political characteristic of terrorism that is stated in multiple academic definitions (Schmid, 2016). Nonetheless, it is worth noting that while the goal of terrorism may include ideological or religious motivations, it is always under the umbrella of a political dimension (Schmid & Jongman, 2005).

From a social-constructionist perspective, terrorism is only a political label that defines which side one is on (Wilkinson, 1984). In this perspective, terrorism may be no more than political violence; the volatility in definitions highlights the concern that social constructionists propose: that terrorism is a political label, applied in response to whether the person sympathises with or opposes the perpetrator (Schinkel, 2009; Ramsay, 2015). The absence of an internationally agreed definition indicates that, within different political spheres, "terrorism is in the eyes of the beholder" (Innes & Levi, 2012, p. 661). Politics, in itself, is a controversial concept, which generates plenty of disagreement. The meaning given to terrorism is subjective; hence, what brings difficulty in defining terrorism is that the characterisation of a terrorist act is dependent upon who is making a particular judgement. As a social construct, terrorism is a paradox. The social construction of the term implies that, in theory, terrorism can be whatever one individual says it is – it is a subjective term. Therefore, it ultimately comes down to who has the power to define it (Butko, 2006). It is pertinent to note that terrorism is a derogatory term, carrying negative associations. By not having a precise

definition, it has been usually applied to a rival opposing the interests of the defining actor, usually the state against which terrorism is directed. The term possesses a political dimension, which has affected much of the discourse around this phenomenon.

The famous cliché that “one person’s terrorist is another person’s freedom fighter” captures the essence of defining what is fundamentally perceived to be the “political” nature of terrorism. On the one hand, regimes call those who fight against them terrorists; while on the other hand, those who perpetrate violence by whatever means against those same regimes regard themselves as freedom fighters. Nonetheless, the most common trait of terrorism is the massive fear and intimidation it instigates in those whom it is directed against. Thus, it is hardly surprising that there is no universally accepted definition of terrorism; hence why governments have devised their own. This creates difficulties in the practical realm of the international community. Golder and Williams (2004, p. 272) argued that terrorism should be described as precisely as possible, as any shortcoming and inadequacies would offer too much power to the state. As there is no universal definition of terrorism to which the international community can refer to, governments have the freedom to define terrorism as they deem appropriate (Butko, 2006). This highlights the absence of a universally shared foundation upon which the rule of law and effective counter-terrorism measures can be devised.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan described terrorism as any act *“*intended to cause death or serious bodily harm to civilians or non-combatants with the purpose of intimidating a population or compelling a government or an international organisation to do or abstain from doing any act*”* (UNODC, 2005). In the United Kingdom (UK), the Terrorism Act (2000) defines terrorism as:

> Terrorism means the use or threat of action where the action falls within subsection (2) (i.e. violence, serious damage, endangering life, etc.) and (b) the use or threat is designed to influence the government or to intimidate the public or a section of the public, and (c) the use or threat

> is made for the purpose of advancing a political, religious or ideological cause.

Terrorist action is further defined in Section 1(2) as:

> Acts involving serious violence against a person, serious damage to property, acts that endanger a person's life, other than that of the person committing the action; acts that create a serious risk to the health or safety of the public or a section of the public, or acts designed seriously to interfere with or disrupt an electronic system.

In the US, the Department of State proposed one of the most widely used definitions of terrorism, and it described it as “premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience” (US Department of State, 2004). International terrorism involves the territory or the citizens of more than one country, while a terrorist group is any group that practices, or has significant subgroups that practice international terrorism (US Department of State, 2004).

To compare, the UK’s definition omits the element of intent. While the US definition does include the element of intent by looking at premeditated acts, it limits the purpose to politically motivated goals. Similarly, both states’ definitions recognise that terrorism is a violent crime; however, due to their generic content, a high number of acts can be considered as terrorism and that includes death, bodily harm, risk to health and well-being, the destruction of property, etc. – this, again, brings back the idea of who has the power to recognise a specific crime as a terrorist act. Indeed, the connection between crime and terrorism can be easily established; however, identifying the two as one causes controversy, particularly when considering the purpose of terrorism. Yet, both definitions recognise that the underlying motivation for terrorist attacks relates to the political, religious, or ideological beliefs of the terrorist organisation, and they recognise that terrorist acts are purposely intended to influence not only the general public through the use of fear, but more importantly, policymakers.

States have not been yet able to reach a consensus on a comprehensive agreed definition of terrorism, leaving this as vague as possible. This can result in infringements of civil rights and the potential abuse of power by the state in its pursuit of fighting terrorism and protecting national security. Therefore, it is not wrong to argue that "the absence of an internationally accepted definition of terrorism has led to international lawlessness" (Acharya, 2009, p. 768). Contrastingly, Carr (2007) contends that the definition of terrorism "must be broad if we are to recognise and expose terrorism in every one of its guises and permutations" as this will inform a better understanding of what it encompasses. Similarly, Saul (2007) opines that a single definition of terrorism is necessary across disciplines as it will not only provide better management of terrorist acts but can shape how the term is used by national and international actors. However, Rubenstein (2004, p. 397) argues that "a definition of terrorism is hopeless … terrorism is just violence that you don't like". Indeed, terrorism is difficult to define as long as answers to questions such as what is terrorism or what constitutes a terrorist act remain highly debated across the academic, political and popular discourse (Silke, 2001; Butko, 2006; Hoffman, 2017; Schmid, 2018).

As a term, terrorism has been widely analysed across various branches of knowledge. Certain branches of terrorism studies regard terrorists as the instrument of their studies. From this perspective, the subject of study is the terrorist actor and the description of his terrorist behaviour (Hülsse & Spencer, 2008). However, arguments suggest that this approach is based more on a social judgement than an understanding of the phenomenon per se (Sorel, 2003). Distinct approaches to understanding terrorism focus upon those labelling terrorists as such. These studies stress the subjective nature of terrorism and try to reveal the power dynamics at play in generating such labels (Butko, 2006). Similarly, Laqueur (2000, p. 79) proposes that "there has been no 'terrorism' per se, only different terrorisms." Indeed, the misleading labelling, along with the institutional limitations organisations face when studying this phenomenon, have created a situation that led to a lack of a widely accepted definition.

Hence, the failure to devise a standard definition of terrorism has left the possibility for some to define terrorism in ways that serve their own political and strategic interests and which influence counter-terrorism initiatives profoundly. As Saul

(2006) has noted “the more confused a concept, the more it lends itself to opportunistic appropriation”. This undermines any attempts to generate international cooperation against terrorism and can, on the other hand, lead to counter-productive strategies. The disagreement about terrorism raises moral, political and ideological questions about the legitimate use of violence (Butko, 2006). An internationally agreed definition of terrorism presumes agreement about who is entitled to use violence, against whom, and for what purposes, which is not an easy task due to the diverse political, moral and cultural systems around the world (Butko, 2006; Saul, 2012).

Schmid (2004) opines that terrorism is an abstract concept and it cannot be summarised in a single definition. Moreover, the meaning of terrorism is usually derived from its victims and targets. However, terrorism generally has some characteristics that can be found across disciplines. First, terrorism is a rational act that uses violence or the threat of violence. Second, it aims to accomplish a particular political purpose. This, for instance, can be observed in Wilkinson’s definition (2002, p. 12) as he asserted, “terrorism is the systematic use of coercive intimidation, usually to service political ends”. While terrorism’s objectives may include ideological or religious motivations, terrorism always has a political dimension. For terrorist groups, terrorism is not the political goal itself, but a specific strategy through which the goal can be achieved (Stepanova, 2008).

Bassiouni (2008, p. 710) also proposed a definition of terrorism that regards this phenomenon as a strategy:

> Terrorism is an ideologically-motivated strategy of internationally proscribed violence designed to inspire terror within a particular segment of a given society in order to achieve a power-outcome or to propagandize a claim or grievance, irrespective of whether its perpetrators are acting for and on behalf of themselves, or on behalf of a state.

From this perspective, the motivations of terrorism are considered a “power outcome” or propaganda of a “claim” or a “grievance”, and it excludes any acts that are not motivated by political or ideological objectives. Arguably, the definition does

not specifically include the element of intent that is present in other definitions. However, it could be argued that since the terrorist act is regarded as a strategy that entails rationality and planning, the element of intent can be assumed. Moreover, the act of violence is “designed to inspire terror”, which also highlights the pre-meditated intent of the terrorist action. Bassiouni's definition also disregards the targeting of civilians; instead, it refers to “a particular segment of a given society”. This allows a broader designation of targets, from civilians to military targets.

However, one must take into account that terrorist groups aim to attack large groups of individuals and symbolic targets; terrorism is not only about causing material damage, but causing fear among its targets as this fear will force governments to respond (Mueller, 2006; Schneier, 2006). Stohl (1988, p. 5) argues that “terror is a message of strength, a warning designed to intimidate, to ensure compliance without the need to physically touch citizen […] the more extensive is the message, the more successful is the act”. Terrorism has always been a planned, purposeful and systematic action (Hoffman, 2017). Nonetheless, what distinguishes terrorism from other violent activities is its capability to instil fear. One of terrorism’s characteristics is provocation – although it is not only this feature that distinguishes it from criminal acts, it is crucial when initiating a reaction from governments. Terrorism is specifically directed against civilian targets, or it is intentionally indiscriminate. However, while civilians are the most immediate targets of terrorism, in most cases those victims are not the intended end recipients of the terrorist message (Stepanova, 2008). Terrorism is an act that involves the use or threat to use violence against civilians, but the action is performed specifically for an intended audience. Most commonly, the intended audience is a state (or the international community), and the terrorist act aims to coerce the country into doing or withholding from doing something (Stepanova, 2008) As Walter (2003) opines, some legal definitions include the ‘fear’ and ‘intimidation’ characteristics, alongside the intention to compel a government when referring to terrorism. This also implies that individuals can force governments without spreading fear, and this would still constitute a terrorist act.

From a more traditionalist perspective, terrorism has certain features that separate it from other criminal actions (Furedi, 2013). Not only it is a form of action

aimed at achieving political means, but what distinguishes it from other forms of criminal behaviour is the nature of this violence, characterised by "indiscriminateness, unpredictability, arbitrariness, ruthless destructiveness and the implicitly amoral antinomian nature of a terrorist's challenge" (Wilkinson, 1976, p. 17). Therefore, it could be argued that the most common elements of terrorism are the use of violence, political motivation, the use of threat, causing fear or terror, psychological effects, and indiscriminate victim-targeting.

Hoffman (2017) argues that a generic definition of terrorism can be devised as specific characteristics that distinguish it from other forms of violence. Innes and Levi (2012) support this argument and suggest that, unlike other violent crimes, terrorist acts are carried out in pursuit of political objectives and are aimed at spreading their message not only to their direct victims but also to more powerful adversaries (i.e. governments). Considering these, Hoffman (2017, p. 40) argues that terrorism can be defined as "the deliberate creation and exploitation of fear through violence or the threat of violence in the pursuit of political change". As concluded by Silke (2004), "an agreed definition allows the research world to develop shared methods, approaches, benchmarks and appropriate topics for study. Without a definition, the focus of the field is scattered and fragmented, and an unrealistic range of activities, phenomena and actors have been labelled as terrorist".

2.4 The Evolution of State-Sponsored Terrorism

State sponsorship is one element that has played a significant role in facilitating terrorism (Byman, 2005b; 2020; DeVore, 2012). State sponsorship of terrorism is defined as providing designated terrorist groups with assistance (Byman, 2020). States and terrorist organisations have always been connected; while state sponsorship of terrorist organisations is an important concern of terrorism studies, it could be argued that this phenomenon has not received enough consideration in recent years (Byman, 2005b; 2008; 2020; Maogoto, 2003; Collins, 2014). During the 1970s and the 1980s, some of the most dangerous terrorist organisations had close ties with governments for support, while at the same time, state sponsorship facilitated the rise of international jihadist terrorism in the 1990s (Byman, 2005b; Collins, 2014).

Nonetheless, research shows that state sponsorship has a relatively lower influence on twenty-first century international terrorism (Giraldo & Trinkunas, 2007; Byman, 2005b; DeVore, 2012). Literature suggests that state sponsorship has not disappeared, but it has declined considerably (Giraldo & Trinkunas, 2007; Byman, 2005b; Collins, 2014). Although the dynamics between states and terrorist organisations have changed over time, it does not imply that their relationship is less important nowadays, as state sponsorship still plays a significant role for some terrorist organisations (Byman, 2005b; DeVore, 2012). The relationship between the sponsor-state and the terrorist organisation is usually reciprocal and mutually beneficial: terrorist organisations use state sponsorship to support their agenda, while the sponsoring state is using the terrorist organisation as means to achieve its political objectives (Forest, 2007).

It is worth noting that the notion of state-sponsored terrorism also lacks a universal definition. The incertitude over an accurate depiction of state-sponsored terrorism reflects the disparities over the definition of terrorism itself. Several scholars have considered state-sponsored terrorism as a political tactic in terms of foreign policy (Cline & Alexander 1986; Jenkins 1974) or diplomacy (Gal-Or, 1993). Other scholars, such as Byman (2005), conceptualised state-sponsored terrorism as an alternative to war and negotiation. Nonetheless, the consensus indicates that state sponsorship is, to some extent, a foreign policy action (Gal-Or, 1993).

Cline and Alexander (1986, p. 46) define state-sponsored terrorism as “the direct or indirect instigation by a government of official and non-official groups to exercise psychological or physical violence against political opponents, another government, or other entity for purposes of coercion and widespread intimidation to bring about a desired political or strategic objective”. However, this definition is broad, and it could incorporate acts of political violence such as ethnic cleansing, genocide, or widespread targeting of a political opposition, which complicates the understanding of state-sponsored terrorism. On the other hand, Byman (2005) offers a minimalist definition that describes the relationship between the state and the non-state actor. Byman (2005, p. 10) defines state sponsorship as “a government’s intentional assistance to a terrorist group to help use its violence, bolster its political activities or

sustain the organisation". However, this definition does not provide a comprehensive review of the types of "assistance" provided, only discussing the function of state sponsorship. Nonetheless, any government that supports acts of terrorism or assists a terrorist organisation can be considered a state sponsor. Alexander and Hoenig (2008) point out that a state sponsor and a terrorist organisation start building a relationship occurs "once a group identifies ideologically and psychologically with a certain government; it is fairly simple for that government to direct, or at least influence, the actions of that group". State sponsors provide a wide range of assistance, such as ideological, financial, military, and operational support, or involvement in terrorist attacks (Martin, 2003). State sponsorship can be understood as a government's support for terrorist organisations to engage in terrorist activities against a country, which it wishes to inflict harm, but without taking direct responsibility, coercing and intimidating the targeted government to adopt a preferred political or strategic objective. A state can either covertly but directly engage in international terrorism, or it could secretly support a terrorist group that shares a grievance against the same opponent without taking direct responsibility for the terrorist actions (Forest, 2007).

State sponsorship has been a powerful tool for terrorist organisations, as the stable and continuous assistance empowers them to adopt long-term strategies toward achieving political goals (Forest, 2007; DeVore, 2012). Cline and Alexander (1985) define state sponsorship of terrorism as

> the deliberate employment of violence or the threat of use of violence by sovereign States (or sub-national groups encouraged or assisted by sovereign states) to attain strategic and political objectives by acts in violation of law intended to create overwhelming fear in a target population larger than the civilian or military victims attacked or threatened.

Hence, state sponsorship comprises of several specific elements:

1) A terrorist organisation;

2) A state willing to sponsor a terrorist organisation;

3) An intended political outcome;

4) And a target whose death, injury or destruction is expected to influence to a certain degree the achievement of the intended political outcome.

There is a multitude of factors that determine a state's inclination to sponsor terrorism, including ideological or religious motivations, state security, regime security, as well as potential various tactical and strategic objectives (Hoffman, 2017; Alexander & Hoenig, 2008). For some governments, state sponsorship of terrorism represents a means to achieve their political goals instead of doing so through conventional political, diplomatic, or military means (Byman, 2005b; Maogoto, 2016). State-sponsored terrorism replaces traditional forms of warfare, which are considered excessively costly or could result in unexpected consequences; thus, supporting a terrorist organisation can be cheaper and safer than using the military. Not only modern warfare is expensive, but it is very likely to result in a counterattack, which can cause further damage to the countries involved. Instead, governments can sponsor terrorism covertly, allowing the state to deny its role as an aggressor, avoiding retaliation and escaping international accountability (Hoffman, 2017). For some countries, terrorism is seen as a substitute for modern warfare and the sponsoring state provides a wide range of support mechanisms, including financial aid, weapons, training, intelligence, safe haven and even direct involvement (Martin, 2003; Forest, 2007; Byman, 2005b). Alexander and Hoenig (2008, pp. 53-545) argue that:

> A sponsor government can […] facilitate any or all levels of material aid necessary for a group's survivability, expansion, and operational capability. Such government aid can range from lending sanctuary to individual members of a terrorist organisation to the establishment of a full range of propaganda and logistical support facilities for the movement.

In recent decades, it has also equipped state sponsors of terrorism with more modern and rapid means to conduct international terrorist activities, with little evidence that can hold them accountable. According to Richardson (2007, p. 51):

> state sponsorship of terrorism has had relatively low risk because it is so difficult to prove and may serve to achieve a state's foreign policy objectives. If it does not, it is easily deniable. Moreover, the primacy placed on human life by Western democracies leaves them very vulnerable to attack through their individual citizens because there are so many of them in so many places. So state sponsorship is often low cost, easy to deny, and difficult to prove, and has potential for a high payoff.

Byman (2005) argues that state-sponsored terrorism encompasses active and passive sponsorship. Active state sponsorship occurs when a government provides a terrorist organisation with support such as weaponry, money, propaganda, or a safe haven (Byman, 2005b). By providing a terrorist organisation with weapons, for example, state sponsorship increases the lethality of terrorism by providing the group with far greater military capability than they would ever be likely to obtain in the regular arms market. Moreover, government resources can be easily directed to terrorist groups directly or indirectly through social, cultural, or charitable associations.

States sponsor existing organisations based on shared interests. The sponsoring state provides its beneficiary with political support, financial assistance, and all the other means to maintain an operational structure and achieve its objectives. Some sponsor states also offer a safe haven for terrorists, but do so covertly as this implies the risk of revealing extensive involvement with the terrorists and could result in retaliation from the international community (Byman, 2005b; Carter, 2012; Hoffman, 2017). The Libyan government, for example, provided explosives training, hijacking, assassination and various guerrilla, as well as training camps for the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) in Libya (Byman, 2005b; English, 2013).

Passive state sponsorship occurs when a government's deliberate inaction allows the terrorist organisation to carry on its activities undisturbed (Byman, 2005b). For example, for many years, the US allowed PIRA to raise money and organise on US soil with little interference (Byman, 2005b). It was only in the 1980s when British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, put pressure on the US to take action against PIRA

and to allow suspects to be extradited for trial (Byman, 2005b). Moreover, a government can use its state intelligence and security apparatus to covertly commit an act of terrorism in another country that opposes its strategic and political interests in a region. Additionally, a state can provide a haven for terrorists, allowing them to operate freely in its territory while conducting terrorist acts in the targeted country (Carter, 2012). Some state sponsors offer financial assistance to terrorist organisations and refuse to extradite those who face criminal charges (Carter, 2012). For example, state sponsorship can isolate the terrorist group from the repercussions of the international community, and it can significantly complicate the efforts of a target state - that is, the target of the terrorist group - to use counter-terrorism measures effectively in pursuing the terrorist organisation. It is argued that this is the case with Iran and Hezbollah, as the provision of training, funds, and weaponry from its state sponsor significantly increased the group's ability to resist international counter-terrorism efforts over the years (Levitt, 2005b; Carter, 2012; DeVore, 2012; Khan & Zhaoying, 2020).

It is frequently argued that fragile or so-called 'rogue states' are more likely to sponsor terrorism because:

> for aggressive regimes, state terrorism in the international domain is advantageous in several respects: State terrorism is inexpensive. Even poor nations can strike at and injure a prosperous adversary. State terrorism has limited consequences. State assisters that are clever can distance themselves from culpability for a terrorist incident… and thereby escape possible reprisals or other penalties. State terrorism can be successful. Weaker states can raise the stakes beyond what a stronger adversary is willing to bear… [and] successfully destabilise an adversary through the use of a proxy movement (Martin, 2003, p. 91).

State sponsorship of terrorism by fragile states is used to enhance their regional and international influence. A weaker state may also be in a position to oppose a powerful adversary in the global diplomatic dominion by offering its support to terrorist organisations (Richardson, 2007). For example, Iran increased its power in the Middle

East by supporting Hamas in Palestine and Hezbollah in Lebanon (Byman, 2005b). At the same time, the terrorist organisation itself has a strategic motivation in seeking external support from a state, as this allows it to build itself up. Hezbollah, for instance, has infiltrated the political apparatus and achieved high status within Lebanese politics, a position it may not have been able to establish without the help of Iran and Syria (Byman, 2005b).

Combs (2009, p. 81) emphasises that sponsoring terrorist groups "continues to be an attractive foreign policy option" for governments as this guarantees states a cover which separates them from the terrorist acts, as well as providing them with deniability for direct participation in attacks. Byman (2008) also defends the argument that sponsors regard their support for terrorism as conveying several benefits in terms of strategic power, ideology, and political objectives. State sponsors often view the terrorist organisations they support as a tool that can be used to weaken neighbouring states, to collapse rival regimes and control the opposition in rivals states, as well as an instrument of power in places where the use of a state's military forces would not be feasible (Byman, 2005b; Collins, 2014; Hoffman, 2017).

Nevertheless, the dynamics between states and terrorist groups have changed over the years. Globalisation has facilitated access to a robust market of weapons; hence, the access to a country's arsenal is no longer required for a terrorist organisation to carry out attacks (Byman, 2005b). Nowadays, weapons are widely available on the black market. Moreover, modern terrorism has become increasingly self-funded; for example, Al Shabaab is acquiring funds through Islamic charities, extortion, and racketeering (Levy & Yusuf, 2019). Even so, active aid continues unchanged as money, training, diplomatic support, sanctuary, and other forms of support are still necessary for the development and continuity of terrorist organisations (Byman 2008; Carter, 2012). However, it must be noted that the sponsoring state is exploiting the availability of already-existing terrorist organisations, not creating them. Terrorist organisations exist before they receive support from a state sponsor. The original Irish Republican Army, for example, was founded in the early 1920s, but PIRA did not receive support from the Libyan regime until the early 1970s, when Colonel

Gaddafi provided them with modern weaponry in their fight against the British (BBC News, 2011).

State sponsorship of international terrorism has been practised mainly by various states over the past half-century. It has not, however, remained the same. Collins (2014) identifies three phases of state-sponsorship evolution: the *peak* (1970-80), *intermediate* (1990-2001), and *low* period (2001-present). He argues that in the peak phase, the number of states involved in state sponsorship was extremely high during the 1970s and 1980s as states, including Cuba, Iran, Libya, North Korea, and South Yemen, were actively engaged in sponsoring terrorist organisations (Collins, 2014). The Cold War contributed to the increase in state support for terrorist organisations, as the Soviet Union, as well as Eastern European states, provided ammunition, training, equipment, and safe haven to various terrorist organisations (Byman, 2005b; Giraldo & Tribunas, 2007). Likewise, the US sponsored various campaigns of state terror involving assassinations of political opponents across South America and beyond (Goñi, 2016). The US is considered by some analysts to be the state sponsor of the era, as support was offered to Nicaragua's Contra rebels in their insurgent campaign and tacitly allowed Irish republican terrorists to raise money and plan their activities from US soil (Combs, 2009; Byman, 2005b).

Sponsors during *the peak* phase provided high levels of support to terrorist groups, including a wide range of support mechanisms such as training, provisions of arms, intelligence, and safe haven (Byman, 2005b; Woods & Lacey, 2007; Carter, 2012). During the peak phase of state sponsorship of terrorism, state sponsors played a vital role in facilitating the spread of international terrorism as terrorist organisations relied heavily upon their sponsors to enhance their operational capabilities, with the most significant number of states willing to engage in supporting terrorist organisations (Collins, 2014). For example, Cuba was designated a state sponsor of terrorism for sheltering fugitives and terrorist suspects from US authorities (US Department of State, 2019). Similarly, the Libyan regime under Colonel Gaddafi used terrorism as one of its primary instruments of foreign policy and allowed training camps for terrorist groups, provided explosives training, hijacking, assassination and various guerrilla

techniques (CIA, 2011). The Libyan government also offered safe haven for Carlos the Jackal, who ran a network of terrorists for hire (CIA, 2011).

The *intermediate* phase witnessed a significant reduction in state sponsorship. Nevertheless, several states remained actively engaged in this practice, and many terrorist organisations remained under their assistance and protection. During this phase, the intensity of state sponsorship that significantly reduced. The disbanding of the Soviet Union and the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe significantly reduced the number of states supporting terrorism. However, two communist states—Cuba and North Korea—remained officially designated state sponsors by the US throughout the 1990s. Yet, while these states did sponsor terrorism in the 1970s and 1980s, their activity as state sponsors declined considerably in the 1990s, with Cuba's sponsorship activities being almost non-existent. At the same time, North Korea's plummeted to insignificant levels (Pillar, 2001). Middle Eastern sponsors also reduced their support. The decade witnessed a general decline in direct state support for terrorism, as many sponsors reduced the extent of their support or even withdrew it. For instance, the case of Libya provides a useful example of the general reduction in state support during this phase (Giraldo & Trinkunas, 2007; Collins, 2014). In the 1980s, the Gaddafi regime remained heavily engaged in terrorism, providing support to a vast number of terrorist groups including PIRA, as well as being actively involved in the direct planning of terrorist attacks (Cooke, 1990; Schwartz, 2007; Byman, 2005b; Collins, 2014; Rodrigo, 2015; Hoffman, 2017). However, the external economic pressure placed upon Libya in the 1990s persuaded the Gaddafi regime to distance itself from providing sponsorship and assistance to terrorist organisations (Giraldo & Trinkunas, 2007). With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Libya lost its main principal sponsor, and it was placed under high economic sanctions by the United Nations Security Council as a result of its support for terrorism, which forced the regime to dismantle its avenues of support (Cooke, 1990; Collins, 2014). Although this example proves that state-sponsored terrorism declined extensively in the 1990s, several states remained actively engaged in this practice. The Islamic Republic of Iran was regarded throughout the 1990s – and still is - as the "most active state sponsor of international terrorism" (Hoffman, 2006, p. 265). Iran provided a high level of support to terrorist

groups, with the total backing estimated at least $100 million annually, as well as weaponry, training and safe haven (Combs 2009; Hoffman, 2006; 2017). Iran's primary beneficiary was Hezbollah, which allegedly received in 1996, three 747 jumbo cargo jets full of weapons each month (Hoffman, 2006, p. 265).

Overall, the intermediate phase sustained a considerable decline in state sponsorship activity. Few states embraced this concept as an instrument of foreign policy, therefore deciding to decrease their levels of support. Three main factors facilitated the decline in state sponsorship. First, the dissolution of the Soviet Union reduced the willingness of states to provide support to terrorist groups as the costs associated with state support of terrorism increased substantially without the backing of the Soviets (Bovenkerk & Chakra, 2005). Second, the end of the Communist bloc created an international system that forced countries such as Libya, for example, to become economically reliant on the states that they were sponsoring terrorist actions against (Bovenkerk & Chakra, 2005; Collins, 2014). Third, the international community reached a multilateral agreement to condemn terrorism and those who provide support for it. Hence, the UN started imposing sanctions against state sponsors forcing them to reduce their support (Collins, 2014).

The most recent period, characterised by Collins (2014) as the *low* period, has witnessed a significant drop in state sponsorship activities. State support for terrorist organisations dropped in this phase because of the convergence of several factors. First, the 9/11 attacks required the international community to join efforts in countering terrorism (Levitt, 2002). The attacks significantly reinforced the guidelines against terrorism, and this has amplified the stigma of state sponsorship. This has also served as an incentive for multilateral counter-terrorism cooperation and enhanced the willingness of states to sanction those who support and aid terrorist organisations in any way. Remarkable changes in the international environment created significant financial challenges for both state sponsors and terrorist organisations, as many global initiatives were developed to target, disrupt, and dismantle their operational and financing networks, especially after the 9/11 attacks (Levitt, 2002; Wang, 2010). Sanctions escalated on the trade, financial and diplomatic ties of state sponsors, amplifying the effects of the intermediate phase (for example, in Libya and Sudan).

Therefore, the material and reputational costs of state support increased significantly after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, which also contributed to the sharp decline of this phenomenon (Collins, 2014).

However, countries like the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Syrian Arab Republic continue to provide significant levels of support for terrorist organisations. Although the state officials will not openly recognise the sponsoring of terrorism, Iran's support for Hezbollah is well documented (Levitt, 2005a; Levitt & Jacobson, 2008; Byman, 2008b; Malakoutikhah, 2018; Khan & Zhaoying, 2020). Iran remains the principal sponsor of Hezbollah as Byman (2005b, p. 88) points out that in 2003, the Iranian government provided the group with annual funding of between $50 million and $200 million, while a 2019 report shows that Iran has sent Hezbollah up to $700 million a year (Sly & Haidamous, 2019). Therefore, it can be stated that for over three decades, Iran has been providing financial, military, and advisory support to Hezbollah and it has also insulated the terrorist group from the full repercussions of international counter-terrorism measures (Byman, 2008b; DeVore, 2012; Shaw, 2019). Syria, another state sponsor of terrorism, has also provided weaponry to Hezbollah (White, 2014). As a result, the organisation has reciprocated the support by launching attacks on rebel forces during the Syrian civil war and helping the Syrian regime regain momentum and adjust the balance of power (Atrache, 2014).

Although state support became less vital over the years to the operational attainment of terrorist organisations, it remains a significant concern in international relations as sponsorship remains an attractive opportunity for states facing power asymmetries against their enemy states. State sponsorship offers weaker states a deterrent capability, as while the government may not be able to retaliate against a more powerful state directly, the terrorist organisation that it supports might be able to do so.

2.5 The Nature and Impact of State Sponsorship

Terrorist activities sponsored by states represent a threat to global stability. State-sponsored terrorism significantly increases the overall terrorist threat as governments have vast resources, which can assist terrorist organisations in reaching

their aims and objectives. Academics and policymakers have stressed that active state sponsorship enhances the overall capabilities of terrorist organisations. However, it is important to note that the levels of state sponsorship vary. Erickson (1989, p. 21) argues that the levels of state sponsorship range from “inaction”, where the state does not have the capabilities to respond and counter the terrorist organisation, to “sponsorship”, when a state directly uses a terrorist organisation and offers support in terms of “training, arms, explosives, equipment, intelligence, safe havens, communications, travel documents, financing, or other logistical support”. Similarly, Jenkins (1986) points out that the benefits of state sponsorship include financial aid, intelligence sharing, sophisticated weaponry, and technical capability. It could be argued that state sponsorship allows terrorists access to a state’s diplomatic, military and intelligence apparatuses, which not only enhances their military capabilities but also provides them with a shield from the full force of international countermeasures (Hoffman, 2017).

Not only do terrorist organisations have access to advanced weaponry and great firepower (Byman, 2005b), but sponsor states also offer intensive training in battle tactics, weapons and explosives, in training camps within their territory (Wilkinson, 1984; CIA, 2011). They provide extensive material funds to support terrorism, which allows terrorist organisations to expand their human resources and military capabilities. And last but not least, sponsor states also provide sanctuary and protection for the members of the terrorist organisation while planning the attack and after the attack has been finalised (Wilkinson, 1984).

However, one of the concerning issues in security studies is understanding the impact of state sponsorship on terrorist organisations. DeVore (2012) also stresses the importance of understanding how state sponsorship influences the decision-making of terrorist organisations. Firstly, the financial aid combined with the provision of safe havens enables the terrorist organisations to adopt a long-term strategy in achieving their aims, as this allows them to recruit more personnel and develop their skills and abilities on a long-term basis. For example, a terrorist organisation financially supported by a state can pay their personnel regular salaries, which enables the group to attract more human capital (DeVore, 2012). Being a terrorist then becomes a job

where individual terrorists can fully devote themselves to gaining knowledge on warfare, and becoming “professional” operatives (DeVore, 2012, p. 86). A sponsoring state can facilitate any or all levels of funding necessary for a terrorist organisation’s survival, development, and operational capability (Alexander & Hoenig, 2008; Shapiro, 2013). Access to ill-regulated financial settings proves profitable for terrorist organisations, as they can continue their operations unhindered. This offers them the option to pursue more calculated and sophisticated strategies than their counterparts who do not have access to such resources (Shapiro, 2013).

Secondly, state support also consists of providing a terrorist organisation with weaponry and ammunition, which enhances their destruction capabilities. Moreover, a significant provision of armament and training increases the options available to such terrorist organisations, and it helps them diversify their agenda. For example, during the Cold War, providing access to conventional arms was a crucial form of support that states offered to terrorist organisations; however, this decreased in modern times due to the availability of weapons on the international market (Byman, 2005b). Even so, funds are required to be able to buy such weapons. And while most terrorist organisations can acquire small weapons, rocket-propelled grenades, and missiles on the black market with state funding (Krause-Jackson & Walcott 2011), the majority of weapons, rockets, explosives, and technology such as drones are still provided by sponsor states (Taleblu, 2018).

State support also helps establish a full range of logistical support facilities for the organisation (Alexander & Hoenig, 2008). A state sponsor can provide sanctuary to a terrorist organisation, which not only shields the group from international counterterrorism actions but also provides it with a way to plan its operations safely and organise its assets effectively. Moreover, the sponsoring state can also use its diplomatic assets, and provide passports and other travel documents, as happened when Libya provided seized passports confiscated from Tunisian nationals to members of Abu Nidal who were responsible for the 1985 attack of the El Al ticket counter in Vienna (Stohl, 1988, p. 326). In addition, state sponsors also offer political support and recognition to terrorist organisations, which gives them legitimacy and helps them assert their demands, while at the same time, it hinders any

counterterrorism efforts. All these conditions provide the terrorist organisation with enhanced success, stability and resilience. For most terrorist organisations, state sponsorship removes the possibility of becoming extinct and offers the support needed to conduct terrorist acts and inflict the desired damage on the opponent.

Alexander and Hoeing (2008) suggest that a certain level of dependency is reached between the sponsoring state and the terrorist organisation, which becomes an instrument of state policy. By sponsoring terrorism, a state can politically destabilise the rival country, destroy its economy, dismay its citizens by damaging their sense of security and, overall, damage the country in ways that direct military warfare cannot achieve. Indeed, various ideological factors contribute to a state's willingness to sponsor a terrorist group; however, governments also use the latter to advance their foreign interests. The sponsoring government can directly fund specific terrorist operations that align with its broader strategic objectives (Alexander & Heonig, 2008). However, the interests of the state and the terrorist group are not always aligned, so the state must provide the terrorist organisation with adequate incentives for attacking targets they would have otherwise avoided (Hoffman, 2017). In other cases, some states will restrain the terrorist organisation if their course of action will force international sanctions against the sponsoring state. For example, Syria – which has long worked with Hamas, tried to control the Palestinian movement to avoid foreign policy risks (Byman, 2008b). Unlike terrorist organisations, sponsor states do not want to be known for their acts, as this will affect their national security and foreign policy (Wilkinson, 1984; Hoffman, 2017).

The relationship between sponsor states and their clients is similar to the dynamics of the principal-agent theory (Byman & Kreps, 2010; Berkowitz, 2018). The principal-agent theory considers state sponsorship of terrorism as a cheaper alternative to conventional forms of international conflict. The principal-agent theory is a valuable model that facilitates the understanding of why certain actors are delegating the authority to execute a particular task to other actors, how this process occurs, and what are the consequences of such actions (Tallberg, 2002). The principal-agent relationship is based on a contractual relationship between a principal and an agent. The theory is based on the concept of delegation, in which the principal (i.e. the

sponsoring state) enlists the agent (i.e. the terrorist organisation) to act in a way that serves its interests (Shapiro, 2013). Through the process of delegation, the principal offers authority to an agent to act on their behalf and offers sufficiently attractive incentives to obtain the best efforts that would serve its interests (Shapiro, 2013).

The principal-agent relationship can be applied to theorising state sponsorship of terrorist organisations. State principals delegate to terrorist agents that help them achieve foreign policy objectives, including power projection, the assurance of continuing access to resources, shifting the balance of power in a certain region of the world, or advancing an ideological agenda (Bapat, 2012). State sponsorship is an effective way to project power beyond the national borders of a state. Byman (2005), as well as Cline and Alexander (1986), argue that for many states the underlying motivation for sponsoring a terrorist organisation is the desire to destabilise neighbouring regimes, shape the opposition within the opposing state, and use this as an advantage to influence regional politics. Sponsor states use the leverage of their sponsorship to compel terrorist organisations to attack their opponents. Some terrorist attacks are motivated by political interest, particularly by advancing the sponsor state's interests in the region by attacking the enemy state (Prunier, 2004; Nasr, 2006). State sponsorship offers a distinct strategy benefit to the sponsoring state in terms of interstate coercion. To motivate the agent, the principal must offer a sufficiently attractive incentive scheme to obtain their best effort (Shapiro, 2013). In essence, the sponsoring state can achieve its objectives with a minimum risk of retaliation from the international community, while the agent maintains its independence but has access to money, weapons, and other benefits of state support.

Usually, the decision to delegate is motivated by the advantages that terrorist organisations have over conventional methods of coercion available to the state (Berkowitz, 2018). Using their proxies to attack their opponent instead of their military forces allows them to deny any responsibility for the attacks and avoid reprisals instead of using an alternative mechanism such as diplomacy or military force (Byman, 2005b). State sponsors not only provide terrorist groups with resources so that they can attack their opponent, but they also avoid any repercussions that might result from supporting them (Carter, 2012). Furthermore, terrorist organisations can be more

effective in organising a successful attack on the sponsor state's opponent rather than the military services as no particular restrictions are imposed on their actions, and are comparatively less expensive (Byman, 2005b). Hence, delegating to terrorist organisations has several distinctive strategic advantages. Firstly, the material costs necessary for supporting a terrorist organisation are considerably lower than the costs of deploying conventional military forces (Wilkinson, 1984; Byman, 2005b). Furthermore, principals may delegate to prove they are committed to achieving their objectives. Suppose a sponsor state cannot successfully prove to their opponent that it will retaliate against any perceived transgression. In that case, it can use its agents to show its commitment to such retaliation actions (Byman & Kreps, 2010).

In some situations, state-sponsored terrorism can be a highly effective instrument of coercion. Unlike modern forms of conventional warfare, terrorism is directed towards civilians, to spread fear and intimidation, thus it can pressure the targeted state to adopt a specific strategy to avoid national unrest (Kydd & Walter, 2006). Moreover, terrorist organisations tend to be more destructive than government actors, using violent tactics against targets that would not be considered by governmental agencies (Byman & Kreps, 2010). Hence, it has been argued that the violence perpetrated by these groups, coupled with their extremist ideology, have increased the bargaining power of sponsor states, as it is believed that only the state sponsor can control its agents (Bapat, 2012).

The principal and the agent usually share a strong ideological bond often, which reduces divergence. The principal-agent relationship between a state sponsor and a terrorist organisation is usually motivated by common enemies, goals, or grievances (Nacos, 2010; Byman, 2005b; Hoffman- 2006; Levitt 2002). A shared ideology facilitates cooperation, and promotes reliability and loyalty to the cause (Byman & Kreps, 2010). A common ideology provides a remarkable source of influence for the principal, but at the same time, it allows the state not to control the agents' actions as long as they serve the intended purpose of the principal. However, it is not a sufficient condition for a successful relationship. Byman and Kreps (2010) argue that this relationship is shaped and improved by how the state sponsor uses its instruments to shift the agents' incentives in favour of pursuing the principal's objectives. If the agent

accomplishes its tasks, the state sponsor rewards this with additional resources that reinforce loyalty and serve as motivation for future acts. However, if the agent does not deliver consistent results that serve the principal's interests, the sponsor state has to reinforce its control over the agent, making the terrorist organisation a more instrumental agent (Byman & Kreps, 2010).

Within the principal-agent relationship, there is a risk that the agents can behave in ways that do not align with the interests of the principal. This problem occurs whenever a principal allows its agent to take its own decisions, and the latter uses this to engage in certain actions that do not serve the interests of its principal (Abrahms, Ward & Kennedy, 2018). The main issue is that the terrorist group often operates covertly to avoid counterterrorism measures, and the secret structures of operation inhibit the sponsor's ability to effectively monitor the organisation's actions (Berkowitz, 2018). Although terrorist organisations may receive orders from their state sponsors, they nevertheless have substantial control over whether and how to carry out those tasks, sometimes striking suboptimal targets due to incompetence or different preferences, which does not always serve the interests of the sponsoring state (Abrahms, Ward & Kennedy, 2018).

Not only is the risk of agency loss an essential consideration in the principal-agent relationship, but states must also consider the negative implications of being identified as a sponsor of terrorism (Byman & Kreps, 2010). On the one hand, sponsors aim to provide sufficient support to facilitate successful attacks perpetrated by their agents. Still, on the other hand, they want to diminish potential military or economic costs they could sustain from the target's reactions. This could impact the state's national security as possible military actions can be taken against the government, as well as economic sanctions, withdrawals from trade agreements, and high reputational costs (Travalio & Altenburg, 2003; Byman & Kreps, 2010). While sponsor states may compel their clients to perpetrate violence against their opponent, there are also occasions where they have to impose restraint. The violent actions of terrorist organisations can lead to military retaliation against the sponsoring state, while the state's national interest is at stake. Most likely, violent terrorist attacks will be blamed on the state that sponsored or directed the attack. The outrage and retribution

will be most likely directed against the sponsoring state (Wilkinson, 1984). For example, the US conducted an airstrike on Tripoli and Benghazi in Libya in retaliation for the 1986 West Berlin discotheque attack – a place popular with US service personnel, where three people were killed, and more than 200 were injured (Hoffman, 2017; Evans, 2020).

Therefore, regardless of how much the sponsoring state publicly denies any responsibility for the attacks, the victim state will seek punitive action. This worsens international relations between the countries and heightens tensions and the possibility of military retaliation (Travalio & Altenburg, 2003). Therefore, sponsor states have an incentive to constrain the level of violence perpetrated by their clients to a subjective threshold under which the state is no longer a potential target for retaliation (Shapiro, 2013). Overall, the sponsoring state can use its sponsorship as leverage to compel their clients to either expand or constrain their activities. In either case, the state sponsor is persuading the terrorist organisation into following a course of action that perhaps would not have been considered. Nonetheless, due to the extensive advantages that state support offers to terrorist organisations, it is a difficult task for them to reject their sponsor's demands.

Ideally, the relationship between states and the terrorist groups they sponsor appears to be mutually beneficial. The state can manage its foreign interests while minimizing the risk of international sanctions, while the agent has access to money, weapons, or safe haven while maintaining its relative independence. The sponsoring state provides its recipient with political support, financial aid, and the other means necessary to uphold its operational capabilities until the completion of its objectives has been attained. The principal uses the agent to commit terrorist acts to spread its ideology or achieve strategic outcomes in circumstances where the use of conventional military forces is too risky and likely ineffective. The high costs of modern warfare, coupled with conflict escalation, and the unwillingness to be classified as an aggressor by the international community, have turned terrorism into a convenient and discrete weapon states use to manage their interests within the global dominion.

2.6 State Sponsorship's Limitations

In his four-wave theory on the development of terrorism, Rapoport (2001) suggests that between the 1960s and 1990s, many terrorist organisations received support from the Soviet Union – the principal who offered its support to clients waging war against the West. However, the collapse of the Soviet Union resulted in a collapse of support provided; a drop in state sponsorship in the post-Cold War period has negatively impacted the majority of terrorist groups sponsored by the Soviets, as many of these groups subsequently disappeared with the collapse of the Soviet Union (Hutchinson & O'Malley, 2007). The significant reduction in the levels of state sponsorship removed a significant income stream for many terrorist organisations and forced them to increase their reliance on alternative sources of funding.

Moreover, since the tragic events of 9/11, most counterterrorism measures have focused on eliminating state support for terrorist organisations (Levitt, 2002). The United States' use of military force also influenced the reduction in state sponsorship. For example, the 2001 US invasion of Afghanistan suppressed state support for terrorism by removing the Taliban government's safe haven provided to Al Qaeda and served as a deterrent for other state sponsors (Wang, 2010). Furthermore, there have been numerous initiatives and increased international pressure and control on the financing, harbouring, and other forms of terrorism support, such as the UN Security Council Resolution and the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism (Wang, 2010). Moreover, the international community can target and label groups as terrorists, freezing the financial resources aimed to support these groups and deterring people from associating with them (Wang, 2010). Over the years, the international community have enacted national counterterrorism measures and frozen the assets of private individuals or organisations that are allegedly sponsoring terrorism (Byman, 2008b). Therefore, many terrorist organisations are increasingly using criminal activities as alternative sources of funding.

Nonetheless, while economic sanctions alone may not dissuade terrorist organisations in pursuing their agenda, it could be argued that they may cause sponsor states that harbour and support them to reconsider the extent of their support

or to put an end to their sponsorship. As noted previously, by sponsoring terrorist organisations, the sponsoring state denies its role as an aggressor, avoiding any form of retaliation and escaping international accountability (Hoffman, 2017). However, when the deniability of the sponsor is not sufficiently exercised, the sponsoring state leaves a trail between itself and the agent, which can have consequences for both parties (Byman and Kreps, 2010). The sponsor is usually motivated by strategic reasons, using the terrorist organisation as a replacement for the state's military forces, who are perhaps unable to carry out the state's agenda. Hence, the threat of military retaliation, and the damage of such countermeasures, serve as an incentive to reduce or end the sponsorship of terrorist organisations after a cost-benefit calculation (Byman, 2008b)

The implications of state sponsorship include the risk of political pressure, economic sanctions, and military strikes, which discourage a sponsor's supportive actions (Byman, 2008b). Moreover, the UN imposed a series of multilateral sanctions against sponsors of terrorism, and the costs associated with state sponsorship of terrorism thus increased considerably (Collins, 2014). Being recognised as a state sponsor of terrorism triggers a series of economic sanctions that ban the trade, investment and financial dealings with other states, which profoundly affect the economy and reduce the possibility of providing support and assistance to terrorist organisations. Such penalties not only affect the economy of the sponsoring state, but it signals to foreign investors and others that more harsh penalties are to follow, hence curbing the support offered to terrorist groups (Byman, 2008b; Sly & Haidamous, 2019). Over time, these sanctions may lead a sponsor state to abandon its support for international terrorism. For example, in the case of Sudan and Libya, the trade sanctions imposed by the international community and the turmoil caused by political instability led both governments to cooperate with the US on devising counter-terrorism initiatives in the hope of putting an end to their isolation (Cooke, 1990; Byman, 2008b). By not having access to state support, terrorist organisations that rely exclusively on their state sponsors are more likely to dissolve (Carter, 2012). However, the decline in state sponsorship has forced terrorist organisations to diversify and seek alternative methods to secure funding, alternatives, which can cause more conflict and

insecurity. For example, Hezbollah has been highly sponsored by the Islamic Republic of Iran in a relationship described as “the most robust relationship between a state and a designated terrorist group in history” (Byman, 2008b, p. 172). Even though the sponsorship is not openly recognised by Iran, the support is well documented (Levitt, 2005a; Levitt & Jacobson, 2008; Byman, 2008b; Katulis, 2018; Malakoutikhah, 2018). In a local speech, Hezbollah’s Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah pointed out that “Hezbollah’s budget, its income, its expenses, everything it eats and drinks, its weapons, and rockets, come from the Islamic Republic of Iran” (Rafizadeh, 2016). For over three decades, Iran has provided Hezbollah with financial, military, intelligence and advisory support (Byman, 2008b; DeVore, 2012; Shaw, 2019; Khan & Zhaoying, 2020). However, the state sponsorship provided by Iran became problematic over time from the international community’s perspective. For many years, the international community imposed sanctions against Iran’s energy and financial sectors, mainly due to its nuclear proliferation activity (BBC News, 2020). Research suggests that various sanctions were imposed on Iran to weaken its financial capabilities to support Hezbollah (Malakoutikhah, 2018; Mroue, 2019; Ottolenghi, 2019b). On the other hand, without benefiting from the aid of its sponsor, Hezbollah diversified its networks and became one of the most well-funded terrorist organisations in the world, particularly due to its involvement in organised criminal activities (Philippone, 2008; Ottolenghi, 2019b). With Iran undergoing devastating economic sanctions, the international community made Hezbollah cautious of relying too heavily on its sponsor and forced the organisation to explore potential new methods for funding.

In modern times, terrorist organisations are far less reliant on state support, remaining operational without the support of state sponsors. The revolution in communication technology has allowed terrorist organisations to expand globally without being dependent on a single state for support, safe haven, or training camps. Moreover, as state sponsors have either ended or significantly reduced their support for terrorist organisations, the necessity of gathering sufficient capital for their operational capabilities forces terrorist organisations to seek alternative solutions, and in most cases, criminal activities often present themselves as the only route to ensuring the long-term existence of the group. Terrorist organisations have diversified

their streams of revenue and pursued alternative ways to secure constant financial revenues by getting involved in extortion, money laundering, drugs trade and supply, burglary, insurance fraud, counterfeit currency, as well as intimidation and extortion (Hutchinson & O'Malley, 2007; Levitt & Jacobson, 2008; Wang, 2010).

2.7 Summary

History has proven that the use of terrorism has been highly destructive. This chapter shows that from Antiquity to modern times, terrorism has been used as a tactic to achieve a specific goal, often political. Frequently used in asymmetric power struggles, terrorism was seen as "the weapon of the weak" who fight against social, economic, and political injustice. Over the years, terrorism has become a highly contentious issue. By looking at various definitions of terrorism, this chapter shows that the term is highly flexible and is open to many different explanations and interpretations, with more than 250 definitions being available today (Schmid, 2011). The absence of a standard definition of terrorism has made it problematic to construct and pursue effective counterterrorism strategies and policies at both national and international levels. However, this chapter has found that "violence", "(the use of) threat", and "politically motivations", along with "fear" and "coercion" are some of the critical descriptors used to define terrorism. This chapter argues that the development of a universal agreement of what terrorism remains vital to fighting terrorism, including state sponsorship.

To understand the crime-terror nexus concerning state-sponsored terrorist organisations, this chapter examined what state sponsorship means today, starting with its definition and characteristics. The analysis shows that state-sponsored terrorism is defined as providing terrorist groups with support, usually in weaponry, training, money, and safe havens (Byman, 2005b). This chapter analysed state-sponsored terrorism and emphasised the distinctions between active and passive sponsorship. On the one hand, active sponsorship is an almost - contractual relationship where a state offers a terrorist group weaponry, training, financial support and safe haven, while the group commits acts of violence that suit the state's objectives. On the other hand, passive sponsorship happens when states turn a blind

eye to terrorist organisations, allowing them to use the state's territory and resources without interference. State-sponsored terrorism is based on a principal - agent relationship, where the state delegates to and supports terrorist organisations to pursue an agenda that upkeeps the interests of the sponsoring state. In this case, the terrorist organisation is used as an alternative to military means, allowing the state sponsor to deny any responsibility for the terrorist actions perpetrated by the group, while the state sponsor provides all necessary means for the organisation's functioning.

Nonetheless, state sponsorship is a major issue that has been subjected to many international sanctions. This created a structure that discouraged state sponsors and other states from considering sponsorship. The sanctions have crippled states' ability to sponsor terrorist organisations; hence, the value of the state sponsor has declined. Benefitting from less state sponsorship has forced terrorist organisations to seek alternative methods to pursue their agenda. Nowadays, guns and explosives are easier to purchase than they were several decades ago. The black market is far more efficient and international, enabling terrorist organisations to access a wide array of weapons and thus not limiting themselves to their state sponsors. In recent times, terrorist organisations are far less reliant on state support. As state sponsors have either ended or significantly reduced their support for terrorist organisations, the necessity of gathering sufficient capital required terrorist organisations to diversify their streams of revenue and to pursue alternative ways to secure a constant stream of financial revenues by getting involved in organised criminal activities, an idea which is further explored in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3: Organised Crime, Terrorism and the Crime-Terror Nexus

3.1 Introduction

The expansion of organised crime networks worldwide has generated significant international action. The openness in trade, finance, travel, and communication has given rise to massive opportunities for criminals to make their illicit business prosper. Globalisation has changed the way crimes are committed. Crimes that used to be restricted to a specific geographical region have now been opened up to the global realm, allowing various transnational crimes to grow and thrive. In this sense, a new phenomenon emerged over the years – the crime-terror nexus (Dishman, 2005; Byrne, 2009; Wang, 2010; Hübschle, 2011; Da Silva, 2018; Puttonen & Romiti, 2020). Despite being regarded as different threats, organised crime and terrorism have formed new relationships. Previously regarded as co-existing, they have evolved into reinforcing one another, transforming their relationship into one of symbiosis, making it difficult to distinguish between them. Although there has been widespread recognition of the nexus between the two in recent years, the international community has failed to define either of these and adopt effective countermeasures.

To address the research questions of this thesis, this chapter starts by giving a critical overview of various definitions of organised crime (Section 3.1). Particular attention is placed on the lack of a common definition of organised crime, which has created controversy and disagreements, particularly in how governments approach various aspects of the problem. This section argues that, similar to the concept of terrorism, there is no single uniformly accepted definition of organised crime. This is followed by an examination of organised criminal groups and terrorist organisations, concentrating on differences and similarities and the nature of links between them (Section 3.2). This section explores the connections between international terrorism and transnational organised crime, particularly assessing the factors that drive the cooperation between the two.

This chapter engages in a critical analysis of the previous work written about the collaboration between terrorist organisations and organised criminal groups (Section 3.4). It outlines several fundamental theoretical models that have been developed by scholars and academics and which have a direct application to the study of linkages between organised crime and terrorism. This aims to provide an understanding of the connections between these two phenomena that can be further applied to the case study of this thesis, looking at Hezbollah's involvement in organised criminal activities. Using relevant examples, this chapter provides an analytical understanding of what the crime-terror nexus is and how it occurs, offering critical remarks on selected aspects related to the evolution of this concept.

By doing so, this chapter builds on the previous one by focusing on the crime-terror nexus in the context of the Lebanese organisation known as Hezbollah. This chapter investigates the factors that drive the crime-terror nexus, focusing on the specificities of Hezbollah and how their involvement in a crime-terror nexus has developed over time (Section 3.5). It critically evaluates available evidence, particularly examining Hezbollah's participation in the Tri-Border Area (TBA) of Latin America, between the borders of Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay. This chapter argues that despite its web of activities, Hezbollah's global footprint is relatively poorly understood. Investigating Hezbollah's international presence and their scale of operations outside of Lebanon, not only highlights the organisation's ongoing terrorist activities, but provides a useful case study of a global terrorist organisation that is involved in organised criminal activities.

3.2 Organised Crime – Definitions and Characteristics

As a subject, organised crime has been highly scrutinised in academia, the media, politics, and in the law enforcement sector. Much like the concept of terrorism, there is no universally accepted definition of organised crime, although there has often been a need for an explicit, shared definition of organised crime, which could allow easier international cooperation to tackle this issue (UNODC, 2010; Gamba, 2016; Calderoni et al., 2019). This is demonstrated by Finckenauer (2005, p. 81) as the author stresses the importance of a "clear and focused" definition of organised crime,

arguing that such a definition could serve “as a legal definition and for public policy purposes, but it is especially important for research purposes as well.”

For many years, organised crime was synonymous with the mafia; some of the first definitions of organised crime mainly equated with the presence of the Italian mafia (i.e. La Cosa Nostra) in the United States (US) (Finckenauer, 2005). Efforts to define organised crime began in the 1920s, when the term was used to refer to gangsters or mafia-type organisations. The Wickersham Commission made one early attempt to define organised crime in 1929, when they considered crimes such as fraud and racketeering - highly associated with the mafia - under the umbrella of organised crime (Arsovska, 2014). In 1968, the US Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act defined organised crime as follows:

> Organised crime means the unlawful activities of members of a highly organised, disciplined association engaged in supplying illegal goods and services, including but not limited to gambling, prostitution, loan sharking, narcotics, labor racketeering, and other unlawful activities of members of such associations (Kelly et al., 1994, p.23.).

Historically, the concept of organised crime has competed with the concepts of mafias and gangs as forms of criminal activity, especially in the US. However, using the term “mafia” to describe all organised crime has proven somewhat misleading, as much of the current organised crime is extremely varied. Although the mafia is considered a form of organised crime, it is not the only one (Finckenauer, 2005). Organised crime encompasses a broad range of illegal activities, including illicit protection and extortion rackets, trafficking and/or smuggling of illegal drugs, humans, weapons and wildlife, cybercrime, money laundering, counterfeiting and maritime piracy, to mention a few (Costa, 2010; UNODC, 2010; Calderoni et al., 2019). Yet, organised crime as a concept remains rather abstract. Despite significant efforts by experts from a variety of social science backgrounds such as criminology, sociology and political sciences to explain its motivations, causes and effects, unfortunately, the “study of organised crime is still in its infant stages” (von Lampe, 2016, p. 13) and “it has not yet yielded a cohesive and cumulative body of knowledge” (Schultze-Kraft,

2016, p.30). Henceforth, it could be argued that, similar to terrorism, as there is a variety of existing organised crime definitions, no single ‘true’ definition can be distinguished.

In an attempt to move away from simply associating organised crime with the mafia, the First World Ministerial Conference on Transnational Organised Crime held in Naples in 1994 defined organised crime as “a form of economic commerce by illegal means, involving the threat and use of physical force, extortion, corruption, blackmail and other methods, and the use of illicit goods and services” (Adamoli et al., 1998, p. 7). Pursuing this further, in 1997, the United Nations (UN) developed the Draft Framework Convention against Organized Crime, which states that “organised crime” means:

> group activities of three or more persons, with hierarchical links or personal relationships that enable their leaders to earn profits or to control territories or markets, internal or foreign, employing violence, intimidation, or corruption, in both furthering criminal activity and infiltrating the legitimate economy, in particular by the following means: illicit traffic in narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances, and money-laundering; traffic in persons; counterfeiting currency; illegal traffic in or the theft of cultural objects; the theft of nuclear material; terrorist acts; illicit traffic in arms and explosive materials or devices; illicit traffic in or the theft of motor vehicles; and the corruption of public officials (Arsovska, 2014, p. 2).

Consequently, as organised crime has become increasingly global over the past decades, the focus changed to the transnational character of organised crime. However, with over 150 different definitions of organised crime (Von Lampe, 2014), the compromise reached within the framework of the UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime, also known as the Palermo Convention, was to define an organised criminal group rather than the act itself (Osmańczyk & Lee, 2003). The definition presented in the UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime, which has been ratified by 179 countries around the world, defines an ‘organised

criminal group' in Article 2(a) as: "a structured group of three or more persons, existing for a period of time and acting in concert with the aim of committing one or more serious crimes or offences established in accordance with this Convention, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit" (UNODC, 2020).

Arguably, the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime does not define organised crime. In essence, any definition of organised crime should include a list of the illicit activities conducted by these groups. However, these activities are continuously altering; hence, a precise definition would quickly become outdated and, therefore, unsuited to effectively direct the international efforts in the fight against transnational organised crime (Puttonen & Romiti, 2020). The UN Convention's definition is the result of international efforts in stepping up the fight against criminal organisations in the 1990s. Therefore, this definition focuses more on the type of 'criminal organisation' rather than the type of 'crime'. The vagueness of this definition, however, makes it somewhat problematic (Calderoni, 2012; Paoli, 2014). It could be argued that many crimes committed are based on the collaboration between two or more individuals and are conducted over a certain period of time. Whether it is a matter of gangs, cartels, or mafias, criminal collaborations are considered to constitute a more significant societal problem than the crime committed by single individuals and they fall under the label of "organised crime" (Albini & McIllwain 2012; von Lampe 2016; Rostami et al., 2017; Puttonen & Romiti, 2020). They could, consequently, be subject to the Convention as long as they are characterised as being 'transnational' (Schmid, 2018).

However, the Palermo Convention definition fails to acknowledge several key features recognised in the criminological literature on organised crime. It is believed that the definition provided by the Convention is too general and simply focused on shared commonalities (Finckenauer, 2005; Paoli, 2014). Unlike other definitions, it does not recognise the use of extreme violence, corruption, the penetration of the legitimate economy through money laundering, and interference in the political process. So far, organised crime can be defined as a group of individuals who develop a structured plan to obtain material gain by committing illegal activities.

Andersen and Taylor (2007, p. 168) propose a simple definition which suggests that organised crime is a type of crime committed by organised groups usually concerning the provision of illegal goods and services to others. Expanding on this, Conklin (2009, p.73) points out the notions of rules and codes by defining organised crime as a:

> criminal activity by an enduring structure or organisation developed and devoted primarily to the pursuit of profits through illegal means. (...) Organised crime has the characteristics of a formal organisation: a division of labour, coordination of activities through rules and codes, and an allocation of tasks in order to achieve certain goals. The organisation tries to preserve itself in the face of external and internal threats.

In this sense, a significant fraction of criminal activities is carried out through some form of collaboration between individuals, whether it is for the pursuit of profits or to protect themselves from emerging threats. Whether it is a matter of gangs, drug cartels or mafias, these criminal collaborations fall under the umbrella of organised crime and are considered a significant security problem (Albini & McIllwain; 2012; von Lampe 2016; Calderoni et al., 2019).

3.2.1 The definitional debate

Von Lampe (2016) proposes a triple classification of views regarding the nature of organised crime, providing descriptions based on activity, structure, and governance. Firstly, Von Lampe (2016) suggests that some definitions focus on the activity itself or the people involved in the task, and claim that organised crime is a specific type of criminal activity. Take, for example, Albini's (1971, p.37) definition of organised crime:

> any criminal activity involving two or more individuals specialised or non-specialised, encompassing some form of social structure, with some form of leadership, utilising certain modes of operation, in which the ultimate purpose of the organisation is found in the enterprises of the particular group.

Secondly, Von Lampe (2016) argues that most definitions focus on attributes such as organisational structures, social patterns, group objectives, their use or threat of violence, or the severity of crimes committed. For example, the definition used in the EUROPOL Serious Organised Crime Threat Assessment (SOCTA) focuses on a "criminal organisation" and includes criteria such as an organisational structure, continuity, severity of crime and group objectives:

> A structured association, established over a period of time, of more than two persons acting in concert with a view to committing offences which are punishable by deprivation of liberty or a detention order of a maximum of at least four years or a more serious penalty, to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefits (EUROPOL, 2013, p. 42).

Similarly, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) (n.d.) defines organised crime as "any group having some manner of a formalised structure and whose primary objective is to obtain money through illegal activities". Andersen and Taylor (2007, p. 168) propose a simple definition which suggests that organised crime is a type of crime committed by structured groups usually involving the delivery of illegal goods and services to others. Expanding on this, Conklin (2009, p.73) points out the notions of rules and codes by defining organised crime as:

> a criminal activity by an enduring structure or organisation developed and devoted primarily to the pursuit of profits through illegal means. (...) Organised crime has the characteristics of a formal organisation: a division of labour, coordination of activities through rules and codes, and an allocation of tasks in order to achieve certain goals. The organisation tries to preserve itself in the face of external and internal threats.

Thirdly, Von Lampe (2016) suggests that the other definitions revolve around the concentration of illegitimate power, as organised criminal groups can infiltrate legitimate governmental institutions or even create an underworld government. Schelling (1984) argues that one of the essential characteristics of organised criminal groups is that they use extortion and protection rackets to achieve monopolistic control

over the illegal markets. He further argued that organised crime is not simply about criminal business but rather the illegal governance (Schelling 1984). Hagan (1983, pp. 52 - 53) supports this assumption and describes organised crime as an "illicit enterprise that (a) uses force or threats of force, (b) profits from providing illicit services which are in public demand, and (c) assures immunity of operation through corruption".

For organised crime to be effective, it uses corruption or intimidation of public officials to guarantee immunity and to protect its criminal enterprises from competition (Finckenauer, 2005; Gamba, Immordino & Piccolo, 2016). By doing this, organised crime is fuelling corruption, infiltrating legal business and the political sphere, and hindering development (UNODC, 2010; Sever & Roth, 2011). Block (1983, p. vii) understands organised crime as an illegitimate system of power in the hands of criminals, arguing that "organised crime is both a social system and a social world. The system is composed of relationships binding professional criminals, politicians, law enforcers, and various entrepreneurs". Corruption of law enforcement officials and local politicians is a common practice, for instance, in various parts of Latin America. In countries like Mexico and Colombia, the narcos (i.e. drug traffickers) use their financial and military power to weaken law enforcement and protect the major drug transit routes (Mendirichaga, 2016; Beittel, 2020). The approach is referred to as the 'plata o plomo' deal, according to which a public official would accept a bribe and live, or he would refuse it, but with the risk of being killed (Dal Bo et al., 2006).

Criminals may use their political, military and economic influence to corrupt law enforcement officials, such as police officers, prosecutors and judges. Bribery allows them to minimise the risk of arrest and conviction. In the 1980s in Colombia, drug cartels controlled large parts of the country through corrupt politicians, judges and police officers (Dal Bo et al., 2006; Mendirichaga, 2016). Similarly, Mexican cartels are also well known to conduct their operations working hand-in-hand with law enforcement officials. For example, Mexican government officials and law enforcement officers often work in partnership with the cartels in a stable organised network of corruption, which undermines the war on drugs (Shirk, 2011). Similarly, in Italy, the mafia has also been connected to politicians who used their power to interfere with criminal investigations, fix trials and elude convictions (Alesina et al., 2016). For

example, in 2011, former Italian judge Giancarlo Giusti was sentenced to four years in prison for releasing several members of the Calabrian 'Ndrangheta', despite the evidence gathered against them (Gamba, Immordino & Piccolo, 2016).

Finckenauer (2005) suggests that an essential characteristic of organised crime is the ability to use the violent reputation and the threat of violence to not only engage in illicit activities but also to gain or maintain control and monopoly over certain criminal markets. However, this hypothesis has its critics. Reuter (1983) argues that there is not sufficient evidence that supports the idea that the individuality of organised crime groups lies in their aspiration to attain monopoly over illegal markets. Instead, he presents a more generic definition of organised crime as "consisting of organisations that have durability, hierarchy, and involvement in a multiplicity of criminal activities" (Reuter, 1983, p.175).

Therefore, in an attempt to surmount the definitional debates surrounding the concept of organised crime, Albanese (2004; 2007; 2015) aims to provide a more comprehensive definition of organised crime by including a couple more characteristics present in other various definitions. He regards organised crime as:

> a continuing criminal enterprise that rationally works to profit from illicit activities that are often in great public demand. Its continuing existence is maintained through the use of force, threats, monopoly control, and/or the corruption of public officials (Albanese, 2004, p. 8).

From Albanese's definition, it can be noted that, unlike terrorism, organised crime is not motivated by ideology but by monetary gain, specialising in the provision of specific illegal services and using threat and violence to maintain a monopoly in a particular market. Albanese (2004; 2007; 2015) also adds that organised crime aims to satisfy the public demand for illegal services and it maintains its immunity through the use of corruption. The strength of Albanese's definition is that it includes many characterisations of organised crime proposed throughout time and many phenomena currently identified as falling under the umbrella of organised crime. However, it is essential to understand that organised crime is not only difficult to define but also tricky to recognise, due to the overlapping of illegal activities with legal ones (Allum &

Gilmour, 2012). Nevertheless, it could be argued that there are several common characteristics of organised crime among most definitions (Finckenauer, 2005; Albanese, 2015; Calderoni et al., 2019). One of them includes the purpose of organised crime to acquire financial profits. Organised crime responds to a demand for illicit good and services. Corruption plays a role as an enabler that protects organised crime operations, along with intimidation, threats and/or force. These elements characterise organised crime as an organised criminal enterprise.

Even so, a common definition has its limitations as organised crime varies across countries, criminal activities, and the nature of its organisation. Accordingly, it is essential to distinguish the universal features of organised crime, but greater knowledge is needed to understand how it manifests across different locations and contexts. Therefore, for this research, organised crime is defined from Albanese's (2015) perspective, who has promoted the use of a definition based on the principles around which previous definitions have been proposed. He argues that:

> organised crime functions as a continuing enterprise that rationally works to make a profit through illicit activities and that […] ensures its existence through the use of threats or force and through corruption of public officials to maintain a degree of immunity from law enforcement […] [and] organised crime tends to be restricted to those illegal goods and services that are in great public demand through monopoly control of an illicit market (Albanese, 2015, p. 3).

Nonetheless, this research takes into consideration the fact that over the years, organised crime has diversified, became transnational and reached macro-economic proportions: illicit goods are sourced from one continent, trafficked across another, and marketed in a third (UNODC, 2010, p. ii). Organised criminal groups vary in size, organisation and structures, the scale of operations, scope, operational methods, relationship with the power structures, which facilitate the efficacy of their criminal networks, and types of activity in which they are engaged (Allum & Gilmour, 2012). It has been argued that organised criminal groups resemble multinational corporations and often operate under a similar hierarchy, adhering to a specific set of rules. In

contrast, others maintain a flexible structure, enabling them to react quickly to law enforcement counter initiatives and new opportunities, such as developing a crime-terror nexus (Arsovska, 2014; Allum & Gilmour, 2012).

3.3 Similarities and Differences - How are the Trajectories of Terrorism and Organised Crime Converging?

Throughout the literature, views are expressed that specific terrorist organisations and organised criminal groups both fall under the umbrella of "transnational criminal groups" (Kleemans, 2014; Martinez-Vaquero et al., 2019; Dwiwarno, 2018). Organised criminal groups and terrorist organisations represent different products of a similar process, as individuals associate into unlawful groups to conduct illegal activities at the expense of the society they want to exploit or intimidate (Enders & Sandler, 2000; Kleemans, 2014). While there are definitional distinctions between organised crime and terrorism, in reality, these distinctions are not clear, as these crimes often tend to reinforce one another. This section critically analyses how the trajectories of crime and terrorism are converging, and it does so by looking at the similarities and differences of the two phenomena and how these form alliances and operational relationships up to the point of convergence.

From a criminological perspective, it could be argued that the fundamental difference between organised crime and terrorism lies in the different motivations of the perpetrators; hence, the most noteworthy difference between them can be found in their final goals. For terrorist organisations, engaging in criminal activity is a means that facilitates the achievement of politically motivated ideological goals (Schmid, 2011). On the other hand, organised criminal groups lack ideology; they are driven by purely material gain, with the ultimate goal of making a profit (Schmid, 2004; 2011; Von Lampe, 2016). Terrorist actions aim to achieve particular political goals by using fear and violence (Wang, 2010; Maogoto, 2016). On the other hand, the goals of organised crime are primarily economic, lacking a political dimension, and aimed at acquiring profit (Wang, 2010). Political goals are only considered side effects of organised crime activities, which help to achieve economic profits, followed by the legalisation of such gains. However, there are also leaders of criminal organisations

that held speeches that raise an ideological argument in their favour, as Pablo Escobar did in his public appearances where he stood as a hero against the oppression of the Colombian government (Bowley, 2013). It could be argued that the ideological discourse is purely rhetoric to justify their illegal activities. However, the social support that organised criminal groups receive from the local population cannot be entirely ignored (Petta, 2018). Pablo Escobar, for example, is still remembered in Colombian communities for his tremendous generosity toward the poor (Bowley, 2013). Similarly, Hezbollah has been portrayed as the party of those oppressed, which challenges deprivation and fights for the rights of farmers, the poor, and the homeless (Flanigan & Abdel-Samad, 2009). Similarly, both organised criminal groups and terrorist organisations tend to build strong social relations with the communities and achieve their public support and recognition.

Nonetheless, unlike terrorism, organised crime poses a different threat to society as it undermines the state's authority in a somewhat covert but continuous way (Abadinsky, 2010; Fielding, 2017). Terrorism openly questions the authority of the state. Terrorists are thought to pursue idealistic goals aimed at reorganising the social fabric; on the other hand, members of organised criminal groups are believed to act in order to gain material profit (Wang, 2010). However, this rather simple analysis, though helpful in illustrating a distinction between organised crime and terrorism, may not be sufficient in defining the actual situation. In other words, while they generally pursue different objectives, the criminal activities of terrorists and organised criminal groups can overlap (Makarenko, 2004; Wang, 2010; Von Lampe, 2016; Schmid, 2018). Terrorism's aim is primarily ideological, but it also needs material resources to sustain its actions. As a result, terrorist organisations can adopt the conventional strategies of organised criminal groups, such as generating income from drug trafficking or other types of criminal activities. Terrorist organisations pursue material gain as a means to support their operational capabilities, as well as a capacity to intensify their publicity and visibility within the international arena (Hutchison & O'Malley, 2007; Wang, 2010; Schmid, 2018).

The Palermo Convention applies to transnational organised criminal groups which aim to obtain "…directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit"

(UNODC, 2004, p. 5). In principle, this would not include terrorist or insurgent groups, considering that their goals are political rather than material. In this case, terrorist organisations would be excluded as they are said to be motivated by ideological and political reasons rather than being profit-orientated. Similarly, Von Lampe (2016, p. 263) points out that "commonly, the lack of political goals is seen as a defining characteristic of organised crime that distinguishes it from ideologically and religiously-motivated terrorist and insurgent groups". However, the Convention may still apply to crimes committed by terrorist organisations if they engage in criminal activities covered by the Convention to acquire material benefits. While terrorist organisations are motivated by political goals, they need to obtain the essential resources for supporting their political crusades. Hence, these groups also engage in lucrative activities covered by the Palermo Convention, such as kidnappings for ransom, drug dealing and smuggling, human trafficking, money laundering, extortion, and prostitution (Costa, 2010; Ruggiero, 2019). Terrorism then can be considered as another form of "organised" criminal behaviour, but it is yet distinct from organised crime. In general, terms, terrorism refers to crimes committed with the purpose of intimidating individuals or organisations, or compelling governments towards achieving political objectives through the use of fear (Schmid, 2011; 2018). Examples can include actions such as kidnapping for ransom or hostage-taking. An act of terrorism is politically motivated, while organised crime, on the other hand, always seeks to obtain financial or other material benefits, with power and control falling into second place. Organised crime can include violence and intimidation, but the main objective of organised crime remains profit (Wang, 2010).

In an attempt to separate terrorism from organised crime, Dugan (2012) points out that, unlike organised crime, terrorism does not encompass specific offences. However, the United Kingdom (UK), for example, has provided a list of potential terrorism offences such as preparation for acts of terrorism; providing and receiving training; membership of a proscribed organisation; fundraising offences; possession of articles for terrorist purpose; possession of information likely to be useful to a terrorist alongside with kidnapping; murder/conspiracy to murder; conspiracy to cause explosions; and war crimes or crimes against humanity (Crown Prosecution Service,

2019). It could be argued that similarly, organised criminal activities range from illegal protection and extortion rackets to drug smuggling and trafficking, human trafficking and modern slavery, weapons and wildlife trafficking, cybercrime, counterfeiting , money laundering, and maritime piracy (Costa, 2010; UNODC, 2010; Schori-Liang, 2011; Ottolenghi, 2019). Terrorist acts are also varied – they include car bombings, kidnappings, hijackings, hostage-takings, mass shootings and suicide attacks (Bertolotti & Beccaro, 2015; Choi & Piazza, 2017; Cragin & Padilla, 2017; Zimmerman, 2018; Loertscher & Milton, 2018). Moreover, both types of crime can cross international boundaries. Globalisation has provided organised crime and terrorism with the possibility to operate across borders (Lutz & Lutz, 2015). For example, hijacking has been made possible due to the development of international civil aviation. Transnational networks have been developed by both organised criminals and terrorists to support their activities, with planning happening across continents. A significant source of funding for many terrorist organisations is drug trafficking, while at the same time, organised criminals also acquire large profits by being involved in the same activity (Wang, 2010). All such activities are exploited transnationally by criminals and terrorists to acquire large material gain.

Dugan (2012) also points out that, unlike organised criminals, terrorists operate towards a broader goal and seek public recognition. Indeed, terrorists usually admit to their actions and use the media to propagate their cause, while organised criminals avoid the media. In this case, these two entities are different when it comes to the "visibility" of their actions. Organised crime groups do not reveal their goals publicly and try to maintain their activities fairly covert (Fielding, 2017). Terrorists, on the other hand, not only broadcast their aims openly to the general public, but they do that to either gain support from people in accomplishing their goals or to instil fear in the general public (Beckett, 2019). Matusitz (2013) points out that there is a clear symbiotic relationship between the media's yearning for extraordinary stories and the terrorists' need for publicity. Matusitz (2013, p.66) suggests that terrorism benefits from "the media's use of fear, whether the incidents are real or imaginary, to frighten and pressure the masses". Henceforth, terrorist organisations tend to claim responsibility for their attacks. In contrast, members of the organised crime groups

almost never claim any responsibility for their criminal acts as this would result in more counter initiatives that would affect their business.

While terrorism is often characterised by a constant clash with the state and a continuous attempt to change the government, organised crime is known for its infiltration, bribery, and corruption in certain levels of government (Blackburn et al., 2017). The connection between organised crime and government officials appears to be fundamentally different, as organised criminals tend to use corruption as a means to collaborate with government officials, while terrorists fight against a government. Nonetheless, Grabosky and Stohl (2010, p.27) argue that "despite their differences, organised crime and terrorism have much in common". Although organised crime and terrorism are motivated by different objectives, these differences can become blurry in a mix of illegal and violent activities aimed at achieving both financial gains as well as power (Ruggiero, 2019). When looking at terrorism and organised crime, the differences between these groups may only be in terms of political and/or ideological motivations. The interactions between crime and terror, however, can go in the other direction as their structures and modus operandi can be very similar in most cases (Makarenko, 2004; Wang, 2010; Moro et al., 2015).

For instance, organised criminal groups can use terrorist tactics, while the involvement of ideology and politics forms the boundary. According to Albanese (2007), whereas organised criminal groups and terrorist organisations have different aims, he argues that eventually, they might cross paths and reach lucrative agreements, as terrorists need the revenues generated from illegal activities to fund their agendas. For example, Napoleoni (2004) suggests that terror groups have developed a self-finance system as the globalisation of the world economy allowed terrorist groups to fund themselves through a wide range of activities, legal and illegal. Based on the different underlying motivations of the groups, Napoleoni (2004) makes a clear distinction between terrorism and organised crime. Still, she argues that these motivations – whether political or simply material - dictate how both groups run their respective dealings. Organised criminal groups run their operations like private corporations, accumulating profit and power being their ultimate goal. Terrorist organisations, on the other hand, are more interested in earning profit to sustain their

terrorist activities, as the revenues are dispersed within the terrorist network facilitating operational capabilities. Nevertheless, Abadinsky (2010) argues that both groups share many characteristics in their structure and financial interests. Yet, while terrorist organisations would use their funds for political goals, the organised crime group would seek to either form a parallel system of governance or to co-exist with the current one (Petta, 2018).

This aspect generates confusion between the concept of terrorism and that of organised crime. The moment in which organised criminal groups pursue political power is an important aspect that contributes to the fortification of the group and their potential to gain extensive criminal profit. Academics mostly perceive the goals of organised crime to be exclusively monetary, not associated with political or ideological motivations (Wang, 2010; Albanese, 2015). However, attempts to influence state representatives are commonly made by organised criminal groups. The latter mainly pursue impunity for their offences and seek new ways to include their illegal gains into the legal economy (Abadinsky, 2010). To prevent detection, almost the entire profit from organised criminal activities is invested in legitimate companies, institutions or humanitarian actions. Shelley and Picarelli (2005) argue that organised criminal groups seek direct infiltration within the political system and pursue politicians who they try to influence for their own goals. While terrorism is concerned with bringing about political change, criminal organisations focus on profit generation and maximisation, facilitated by the infiltration of the political system and legal economy (Blackburn et al., 2017). Like big corporations, organised criminal groups try to manage or mitigate risks such as threats from opponents seeking to move into their business or government and law enforcement agencies aiming to disrupt their activities. Some criminal risk management strategies involve “the use of violence and corruption to neutralise the criminal justice system, to circumvent customs and immigration controls, and ultimately to perpetuate the weakness of the state and maintain the territory as a safe haven” (Williams, 2007, pp. 195-96).

Organised crime represents a continuing criminal enterprise to profit from illegal activities, which are maintained by using force, threats, and corruption (Albanese, 2004). Organised criminal groups engage in criminal operations, obtaining profit as

the ultimate goal, and resorting to bribery and corruption to preserve immunity from the law, avoiding detection and prosecution (Blackburn et al., 2017). While violence and fear are necessary for an act to be defined as terrorism, organised crime can be conducted without resorting to violence. In some cases, organised criminal groups use violence driven by political implications, such as the case of Mexican organisations seeking to control territory and killing politicians that disrupt their plans (Philips, 2018). However, unlike terrorism, violence perpetrated by organised criminal groups against the state is motivated by the desire to be left alone and be able to carry out illegal activities without any law enforcement interference rather than being motivated by a particular ideology (Philips, 2018).

3.4 Terrorism and Organised crime - Defining the Crime-Terror Nexus

The way and the extent to which organised criminal groups and terrorist organisations interact has been the subject of interest for various scholars and increasingly gained relevance in recent years (Hutchison & O'Malley, 2007; Byrne, 2009; Wang, 2010; Shelley, 2014; Rosato, 2016; Shaw & Mahadevan, 2018; Sumpter & Franco, 2018; Ruggiero, 2019; Kreiman & Espadafor, 2019). In recent years, several studies have analysed the connection between these two groups. The main finding is that after the end of the Cold War there has been an increase in the levels of cooperation between the two (Hutchison & O'Malley, 2007; Wang, 2010; Schmid, 2011; Shelley, 2014; Clarke, 2016; Kreiman & Espadafor, 2019). The crime-terror nexus is a reasonably recent phenomenon. In the 1980s, the nexus was used as a reference to narco-terrorism, a term used to describe the usage of terrorist activities by drug traffickers in attempts to influence government policies and hinder law enforcement efforts in Latin America (Martin, 2016). Essentially, narco-terrorism was the first time a link between organised crime and terrorism was recognised in the wider literature. The nexus became more evident in the early 1990s, with the end of the Cold War and the decline of state sponsorship of terrorism (Makarenko, 2004; Hutchison & O'Malley, 2007; Grabosky & Stohl, 2010; Wang, 2010).

With the decline of state sponsorship, the crime-terror nexus has evolved, primarily due to globalisation. As Bovenkerk and Chakra (2007, p. 32) note, “the borders have faded or are no longer as well guarded…and have provided new opportunities” for criminals and terrorists alike. The term ‘crime-terror nexus’ refers to an interrelationship between organised crime and terrorist groups (Makarenko, 2004; Shelley et al., 2005; Bovenkerk & Chakra 2007; Levi, 2007; Grabosky & Stohl, 2010; von Lampe, 2016). Although most scholars agree on this characterisation, the nature of the nexus remains highly debated (Grabosky & Stohl 2010; Makarenko, 2011). Essential works that aim to understand and define this nexus include Williams (1998), Makarenko (2004; 2011) and Shelley et al. (2005).

The crime-terror nexus has been defined as “the degree of overlap between organised crime and terrorism” (Grabosky & Stohl, 2010, p.2). It refers to the relationship in which the two groups evolve and mutually affect each other’s progress. The crime-terror nexus framework can be analysed through the lens of rational choice theory. Akers (1990) suggests that an individual’s actions are constructed based on reasonable judgements informed by the possible consequences that could result from pursuing an action. The rational choice theory assumes that all individuals have the rational capacity to choose the best course of action, which could maximise payoff and minimise costs (Clarke & Cornish, 1985; Akers, 1990; Gul, 2009). Essentially, rational choice theory suggests that individuals rely on rational calculations to make choices that result in outcomes that serve their best interests.

It could be argued that organised criminal groups and terrorist organisations make a rational decision to collaborate, mostly when the benefits outweigh the risks of such collaborations. Generally speaking, terrorists and organised criminals are regarded as rational actors, and even though their motivations differ, they acknowledge that achieving their goals is more important than any motivational differences (Wang, 2010). They both recognise that without the means, their objectives are unachievable. Clarke and Cornish (1985) propose that offenders’ decision-making process in committing a crime results from “rational and obvious responses to the pressures and opportunities of their particular circumstances.” Within

this context, forming a nexus is a choice. However, how, why, and in what form this choice is eventually made remains a subject of debate.

Being rational actors, both groups engage in strategic, mutually beneficial partnerships that can help them achieve their goals. Lykke (1989, p.3) proposes that "strategy equals ends (objectives toward which one strives) plus ways (courses of action) plus means (instruments by which some end can be achieved)." In this context, strategy can be regarded as the use of available resources to gain an objective (Howard, 2002). The strategic approach "involves identifying the means chosen by the actors to achieve their desired goals" and it is concerned with explaining the choices and decisions available to them (Harris, 2006, p.6). These groups have numerous reasons to create a nexus. Considering that these organisations usually share operational mechanisms, operate secretly, often share the need for 'safe-havens', and are highly adaptable, innovative and resilient, it is reasonable to assume that they would occasionally work together (Shelley & Picarelli, 2005, Wang, 2010). From a rational choice perspective, it can be assumed that both groups decide whether they will benefit from a nexus, given a particular set of options. The nexus between organised crime and terrorism can be regarded as a set of rational decisions both groups make, depending on their individualised situations. The level of interaction between the two is highly reliant on the requirements of each group and whether they can completely 'maximise utility' independently or by working together. As rational actors, when choosing between acting independently or receiving more benefit from working in partnership with another group, many organisations have decided to engage in such partnerships (Wang, 2010; Shaw & Mahadevan, 2018; Sumpter & Franco, 2018). Arguably, the two groups will not form a nexus if working together, and sharing strategies and operational mechanisms will not result in the desired outcomes. Rational choice actors act in self-interest: if establishing the nexus is beneficial, then the terrorist organisation will choose the highest-yielding situation within the nexus to engage in a partnership with the criminal group.

It "is the conventional wisdom among terrorism scholars that […] terrorists are rational" (Miller, 2009, p.1).Terrorist organisations are regarded as utility maximising, rational actors that weigh each action respective to their political aims. According to

Freeman (2012), terrorists contemplate six conditions that dictate the choice of financing method: quantity, security, reliability, simplicity, control, and legitimacy.

Terrorists need financial sources that offer the largest quantity of money to be resilient and effective (Freeman, 2012). In this case, the illicit drug trade can be considered the most profitable activity due to the constant global demand for narcotics (UNODC, 2022). Nonetheless, as drugs warrant unwanted attention from law enforcement agencies, terrorists must consider the security of their operations. In most cases, security is guaranteed through networks of bribery and corruption in order to avoid any seizures or arrests by the authorities, which organised criminal groups have access to (INTERPOL, 2016).

The reliability of their operations depends on geography and demographics: to profit from drugs an organisation must be near the source, located on a trafficking route, and have access to a vast number of drug users (Freeman, 2012). This strategic environment is considered the determinant of the information available to an actor and the structure within which actors operate (Harris, 2006). For example, the TBA serves as “a microcosm” for examining this relationship between terrorist organisations and organised criminal groups (Hudson, 2003, p. 6). The TBA countries are located near source-countries, including Peru, Bolivia and Colombia, with Colombia being the world's largest cocaine producer (Stott, 2022). Moreover, it “provides a haven that is geographically, socially, economically, and politically highly conducive for allowing organized crime and the corrupt officials who accept their bribes or payoffs to operate in a symbiotic relationship […]” (Hudson, 2003, p. 2-3). Furthermore, criminal organisations have access to hundreds of clandestine airstrips and negligent border security in Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina (Hudson, 2003). Hence, it is an important area where groups such as Hezbollah are more likely to take advantage of these conditions and engage in a crime-terror nexus in the region.

Another important factor is terrorists’ desire for financial control rather than solely external sponsorship who may question their operations (Freeman, 2012). In this case, it could be argued that this is one of the most important factors that influence Hezbollah’s engagement in a crime-terror nexus. The lack of constant sponsorship, as

well as the desire to be financially independent motivate their partnerships with organised criminal groups. These constraints can significantly "bound" or condition the organisation's strategic processes, which influences their egangement in a crime-terror nexus.

According to Freeman (2012), terrorists prefer simplistic financing methods that require less knowledge, such as petty theft for example. These criminal activities require less skill than elaborate drug trafficking operations, and therefore can be easily achieved. However, a criminal partnership with already established organised criminal groups who possess the 'know-how' and are specialised in this operations, and who have already established an extensive network of corrupt facilitators and trafficking networks, is beneficial for a terrorist organisation. Indeed, in any given setting, "an actor prefers some outcomes to others and pursues strategy to achieve its most preferred outcomes [...] The actor's strategy is its attempt to come as close as possible to the outcome it most prefers" (Frieden, 1999, p. 41). Thus, terrorists will assimilate organised criminal networks into their logistical supply chain as they "...[terrorists] see it as logical and cost effective to use the skills, contacts, communication, and smuggling routes of established criminal networks rather than trying to gain the requisite experience and knowledge themselves" (Shelley & Picarelli, 2005, p.63).

Lastly, terrorists require legitimacy to remain recognised as important actors within the international context; terrorists hesitantly use "illegitimate" sources, like the drug trade, as this can clash with their system of values. Therefore, a fundamental part of the strategic approach is identifying the value system of the organisation and how this affects its legitimacy and its engagement in a crime-terror nexus. Hezbollah's values system contains the following ideological goals: resisting Israel and Western Powers operating in the Middle East, establishing an Islamic state in Lebanon, and offering obedience to Iran's supreme leader, functioning as Iran's proxy (Blanford, 2022; Robinson, 2022). Questions arise as to why, then, would a terrorist organisation like Hezbollah — supposedly motivated by a need to redress a grievance (i.e. fight against the Israeli occupation of Lebanon) —engage in a morally proscribed activity (i.e. drug trafficking), since this could negatively affect its legitimacy?

By assuming the rationality of terrorist organisations, the strategic approach is highlighting that those actors will “survey their environment and, to the best of their ability, choose the strategy that best meets their subjectively defined goals” (Lake & Powell, 1999, pp. 6–7). Historically, Hezbollah’s direct involvement in drug trafficking has been restricted, and the group’s leaders have condemned the drug trade on religious grounds (McCraw, 2003). As an organisation, Hezbollah portrayed a very clear religious and moral stance which forbids drugs and drug trading (Roche, 2018). While, at the same time, Hezbollah’s leaders have emphasised that “narcotics trafficking is morally acceptable if the drugs are sold to Western infidels as part of the war against the enemies of Islam” (Levitt, 2012, p.35). Hence, regardless of the anti-narcotics values they have initially portrayed, the somewhat “moral” justification allows them to engage in such activities. Moreover, one cannot ignore that the drug trade represents the largest single income source for both criminal organisations and terrorist groups (Hutchinson & O’Malley 2007, p. 1098). Drug trafficking is regarded as a means to an end, intended to further their political and terrorist agendas. As long as their primary aims are achieved, the organisation’s legitimacy is unaffected. Hence, Hezbollah retains considerable political support, as many see Hezbollah as a legitimate political organisation (Byman, 2022).

Therefore, it is important to emphasise that terrorist organisation’s involvement in a crime-terror nexus is regarded as a function of organisational attributes and environmental factors. This research adopts the dominant assumption in the literature and presumes that terrorist organisations engaged in criminal activities (i.e. drug smuggling) and implicitly in a crime-terror nexus are acting from a utilitarian perspective aimed at funding their core organisational mission (Felbab-Brown, 2010).

3.4.1 The Evolution of the Crime-Terror Nexus: Types of Interactions and the ‘Black hole syndrome’

One of the earliest works on the crime-terror nexus was developed by Williams (1998), who identified three hypothetical models of interaction between organised criminal groups and terrorist organisations. Williams (1998) suggests that the first model is the *convergence* concept, where organised crime and terrorism merge into a single phenomenon. This could be illustrated by, for example, terrorist groups

engaging in criminal activities to finance their operations, such as becoming involved in drug trafficking. For example, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) was one of the oldest terror groups in the Western hemisphere, and its initial aim was to substitute the Colombian government, but with time the FARC evolved into a major narcotics trafficker, engaging in racketeering and kidnappings (Dishman, 2001; Hutchinson & O'Malley, 2007).

The second model represents the *organised crime-terrorism nexus* hypothesis, which refers to a cooperative agreement between organised crime and terrorism. Williams (1998) suggests that this could be seen in the exchange of arms or the payment of taxes to terrorist organisations by organised criminal groups for moving illegal goods through their territory. For example, Al Qaeda has been protecting Latin America's drug shipments in the Islamic Maghreb, which pass through West Africa and ultimately end up in Europe, generating large amounts of money for the terrorist organisation and criminal groups involved as well (Lacher, 2013).

Williams' third type of interaction is *transformation*, which refers to the transformation of criminal activities to political terrorism or vice versa. There are circumstances where a terrorist group decreases its level of engagement in terrorist activities and increases its involvement in criminal activities, or vice-versa: a criminal organisation becomes highly politicised and drastically changes its actions. For instance, this could be observed in the behaviour of some organised criminal groups, such as the Italian or the Russian mafia, who engage in political assassinations of members of governments (Finckenauer & Voronin, 2001; Alesina et al., 2019; Briscoe & Keseberg, 2019).

Another scholar that focused on the crime-terror nexus is Makarenko (2004), who has identified four types of relationships between terrorism and organised crime across a "crime-terror continuum". Makarenko's model (see Figure 3.1) illustrates organised crime and terrorist organisations as existing on a continuum, with each one situated at each end of the spectrum. The continuum shows the increased range of interaction between organised crime and terrorism. Precisely, it demarcates four

different forms of relationships between the two, including alliances, operational motivations, convergence and the 'black hole' syndrome (Makarenko, 2004).

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Figure 3.1: The Crime Terror Continuum (Makarenko, 2004, p.131)

Makarenko's (2004) continuum proposes that organised criminal groups and terrorist organisations can be assessed based on their similarities. The continuum delineates between the two entities based on their motivations. The crime-terror continuum suggests that organised crime groups are at one end of the continuum, whose sole motivation is material gain (Makarenko, 2004). At the other end of the continuum are terrorist organisations, driven by ideological and political motivations (Makarenko, 2004). Due to both groups changing experiences, motivations and the circumstances in which they operate, the continuum allows them to move from one end of the spectrum to the other, falling into different classifications. According to Makarenko, the crime-terror continuum "illustrates the fact that a single group can slide up and down the scale - between what is traditionally referred to as organised crime and terrorism - depending on the environment in which it operates" (Makarenko, 2004, p. 130).

3.4.2 The Alliance-Building

On Makarenko's spectrum, the first type of relationship on the spectrum is the *alliance*, which occurs when organised criminal groups create alliances with terrorist organisations or terrorist groups pursue partnerships with criminal organisations. These associations can be a single event, or they might last

temporarily, but they are dependent on the reasons for the alliance, including the exchange of expert knowledge such as bomb-making or operational support and access to trafficking networks. For example, Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) operatives trained FARC rebels in bomb-making techniques and sold them tons of explosive material for large amounts of money (Lally, 2006; Cusack, 2015). Similarly, Al Qaeda leaders have collaborated with the Neapolitan Camorra: in this arrangement, the mafia forged documents and provided weapons and numerous safe houses for Al Qaeda operatives crossing through Naples, Italy, in exchange for Al Qaeda supplying the mafia with large shipments of narcotics, particularly heroin (Pontoniere, 2005).

Alliances between terrorist organisations and organised criminal groups are based on the conception that both form relationships with one another to ensure mutual success. However, these alliances do not always suit the needs of the organisations. For this reason, many groups avoid forming partnerships to prevent any possible complications that might arise and instead engage in criminal and terrorist activities within their own groups. For example, organised criminal groups could use terrorist tactics to protect their illegal activities and promote their reputation through the use of fear. Alternatively, terrorists may engage in organised crime as a way of funding their terrorist activities.

Moreover, politically motivated terrorist groups can become economically motivated and engage in criminal activities (Hausken & Gupta, 2016). This, however, is believed to happen when the funding from their sponsors ceases to exist. For example, it is alleged that FARC and PIRA have turned into purely profit-seeking organisations, using their terrorist skills to accumulate financial gains (Byrne, 2009).

Organised criminal groups and terrorist organisations build relationships with each other, and these associations vary broadly. With time, criminal and terrorist groups may develop the ability to engage in both criminal and terrorist activities, merging into entities that display the general features of both groups. Hence, while organised crime and terrorism have different objectives, they can also overlap. Figure 3.2 illustrates the extent of their interaction:

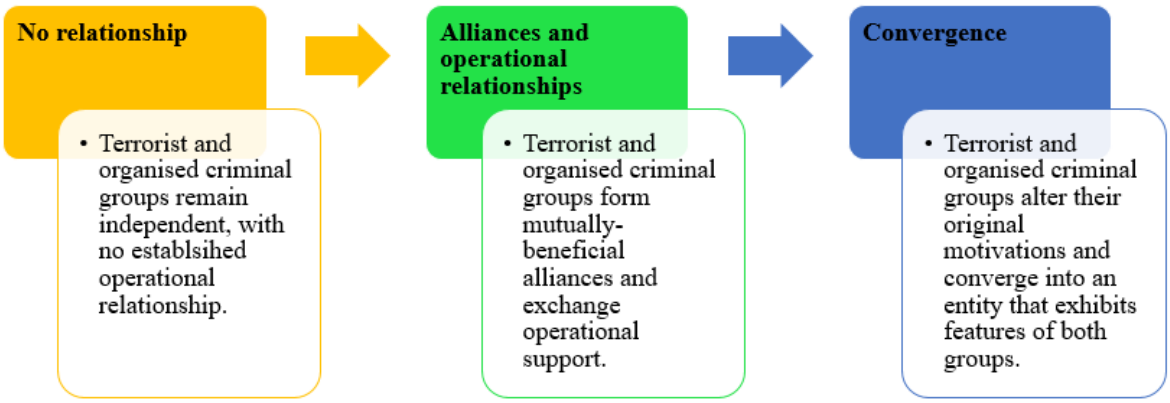

Figure 3.2: The Interaction between Terrorism and Organised Crime (author's own representation)

Following the alliance hypothesis, the second relationship on the crime-terror continuum refers to *operational motivations*, where criminal and terrorist organisations use each other's tactics to enhance their operations and security (Makarenko, 2004). Organised criminal groups tend to engage in political terrorist actions to ensure that the state's law enforcement apparatus does not interfere with their operations. For example, Mexico experienced a wave of political terrorism after President Filipe Calderon declared war on drugs in 2006. The government's initiative to counter narcotic operations led to high homicide rates and an overall public mistrust in the local authorities (Beittel, 2013; Calderón et al., 2015). The homicide rate increased from 8.1 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2007 to 23.5 per 100,000 in 2011 only (Alesina et al., 2019). The number of deaths directly related to cartel violence has been estimated at around 60-70.000, including civilians, politicians and public officials (Shirk & Wallman, 2015; Heinle, Molzahn & Shirk, 2015; Villegas, 2020).

At the same time, terrorist organisations get involved in criminal activities as a way to compensate for the loss of financial support, particularly from state sponsors (Wang, 2010). Following the end of the Cold War and the decline in state sponsorship, there has been a need to search for alternative means of funding to support their ideological objectives (Makarenko, 2004; Bovenkerk & Chakra, 2007; Wang, 2010; Schneider & Meierrieks, 2016). While terrorists used to be connected to their sponsor

states, which provided a reliable source of funding, nowadays, they seem to rely more on criminal activities to fund terrorist activities (Giraldo & Trinkunas, 2007; Shelley, 2014; Makarenko & Mesquita, 2014). This notion is accentuated by the convergence between transnational organised crime and terrorism that is significantly facilitated in situations of weak or failed states and flourishes in conflict areas (Shelley, 2014). Furthermore, the policy aimed at targeting and suppressing terrorist financing has deprived these organisations of a majority of their capital, causing a "turn to crime"; in sum, "since the end of the Cold war and the decline of much state support for terrorism, criminal activity has become the lifeblood of terrorism" (Makarenko & Mesquita, 2014, p. 6).

Although terrorist use of criminal activities is a contemporary development, the current globalised environment allows both criminal and terrorist organisations to engage in profitable illicit activities, particularly in the illegal drug trade. As it is one of the criminal activities that generate the highest income, drug trafficking has been a significant source of revenue for criminal and terrorist organisations. FARC, Hamas, and the Taliban are some terrorist organisations engaging in the drug trade (Byrne, 2009; Acharya et al., 2009; Rashid, 2010; Clarke, 2016). Drug trafficking is the most significant source of revenue for both groups, and at the same time, it denotes the most dynamic connection between the two. Nonetheless, the crime-terror nexus is not exclusively limited to drug trafficking; evidence shows that both groups have been involved in human smuggling and trafficking, the diamond trade in Africa, arms trafficking, money laundering, etc. (Hübschle, 2011; Rollins et al., 2010; Reitano et al., 2017; CTED, 2019; Ottolenghi, 2019).

Traditionally, organised crime was considered a domestic security problem, while terrorist organisations were regarded as armed groups with political objectives threatening a state's autonomy (Wang, 2010; Schmid, 2018). However, both illicit actors actively seek governance gaps, socio-economic vulnerabilities and social weaknesses that allow them to conduct their illegal activities and increase their influence and power (Schmid, 2018). They both need sanctuaries and safe havens, including ungoverned areas with frail border security and law enforcement initiatives

or states that tolerate and/or sponsor terrorist presence, making an eventual collaboration almost inevitable (Sumpter & Franco, 2018; Shaw & Mahadevan, 2018).

With globalisation, terrorist and criminal groups have internationalised their support and operations, formed powerful alliances, and yielded international threats that risk national and international security (Sumpter & Franco, 2018; Shaw & Mahadevan, 2018; Realuyo, 2014). The simultaneous presence of both criminal and terrorist organisations in an area that is permissible for them to carry out their activities increases the threat of instability and disorder because these groups have a shared interest in maintaining the characteristics of the environment they operate in as it favours their activities (Shaw & Mahadevan, 2018). The UN Security Council Resolution 2195 (2014) insisted on international cooperation to disrupt the connections between terrorists and transnational organised crime. However, these mutual relationships manifest themselves in multiple ways, as terrorist organisations and organised criminal groups can co-exist, co-operate and sometimes even converge, requiring governments to understand and constantly develop new policies to address this phenomenon.

3.4.3 The Convergence of Crime and Terrorism and the Concept of "Black Hole"

The third relationship on Makarenko's crime-terror spectrum refers to the *convergence* of both entities. It involves the transformation and fusion of tactics and motivations in a way in which "criminal and terrorist organisations could converge into a single entity that initially displays characteristics of both groups simultaneously; but has the potential to transform itself into an entity situated at the opposite end of the continuum from which it began" (Makarenko, 2004, p. 135). In this case, the need for forming alliances is eliminated as each group attempts to take on the other's role. In her convergence hypothesis, Makarenko (2004) points out that both groups can adopt the other's attributes and specificities, becoming a more potent threat. In this sense, the crime-terror nexus refers to the circumstances in which an organisation transforms and develops operational capabilities of both organised crime and terror (Dishman, 2001; 2005; Shelley & Picarelli, 2005; Hutchinson & O'Malley, 2007). Acharya et al. (2009, p. 104) point out that in terms of convergence, "the nexus

with organised criminal groups gives terrorists a disproportionate advantage in terms of skills and capabilities. Criminal gangs can help terrorists extend their reach beyond the area of their usual operations".

There is extensive evidence that organised criminal groups use terror to promote their political objectives, to pressure governments to change their initiatives aimed to detect and disrupt their activities, to influence electoral results that would benefit their infiltration in the economy. For example, in the early 1990s, the Sicilian Mafia resorted to bomb attacks to challenge the government's efforts to bring mafia members to justice and to reduce prison sentences (Ganz, 2018). Unlike their usual tactics, which mainly consisted of targeted assassinations, the mafias' terror actions aimed to spread fear and distrust in the law enforcement apparatus, which weakened the citizens' confidence in the government (Ganz, 2018). They intended to intimidate and instil fear in the population, a tactic typically adopted by terrorist organisations (Puttonen & Romiti, 2020). The mafia bombing of the Uffizi Museum in Florence in 1993 is an example of where they used terrorist tactics to inspire fear in the population and regain momentum. The mafia did not transform into a terrorist organisation, but their activities were modelled by terrorist actions, even though there was no direct cooperation between them in this particular instance.

The Sicilian Mafia, the Neapolitan Camorra, and the Calabrian N'drangheta have used corruption, bombings and targeted assassinations to silence criticism, scare their opponents, and effectively weaken the rule of law in Italy (LaFree & Freilich, 2017). Similarly, Pablo Escobar and his Medellín cartel pursued a ruthless fight against the Colombian government that resulted in the death of hundreds of police officers and other law enforcement officials. Under Escobar's leadership, the Medellín cartel conducted terrorist acts, including the bombing of a plane that killed 107 travellers in an attempt to kill the leading candidate for the presidency, Cesar Gaviria, who was following a firm policy against drug cartels (Hughes, 2015; Cohen, 2020).

It could be argued, therefore, that in terms of behaviour, the area where organised crime can be separated from terrorism is not precisely clear. The previous example shows that criminal groups can use terrorist tactics - the Sicilian Mafia

planned an explosion that killed the Italian Judge Giovanni Falcone in 1992 (Cowell, 1992); or the more recent use of car bombings by Mexican cartels (Bunker et al., 2010; Dulin & Patino, 2014; Phillips, 2018; Hall & Beal, 2019; Villanueva, 2019) - are all similar to terrorist acts carried out by terrorist organisations (Flannigan, 2012; Petta, 2018). In 2017, the Los Zetas cartel created a video in which they adopted terrorist tactics similar to the so-called Islamic State by beheading one of their victims (Ramirez, 2017).

Arguably, conducting terrorist actions does not infer that a criminal group is a terrorist group. In his study of Mexican cartels, Williams (2012) argues that, despite the targeted murders of press and public officials, the lack of underlying ideological motivations, coupled with the importance of material gain, and the highly targeted violence indicate that these groups are not terrorists, but simply using terrorist-like methods. It could be argued that drug trafficking organisations are not fighting against the state but instead are trying to maintain an alliance with elements of it through practices such as corruption to achieve their economic goals. Hutchinson and O'Malley (2007) similarly argue that in the post-Soviet and post-9/11 context, it has become increasingly challenging for terrorist organisations to find funding, thus they are forced by necessity to come together with criminal groups to satisfy their material needs. These relationships, however, are "temporary and/or parasitical rather than symbiotic" (Hutchinson & O'Malley, 2007, p. 1096). These partnerships are motivated by the need to achieve the funds for the political and ideological aims of terror groups rather than by an underlying desire for transformation into criminal organisations.

Nonetheless, Makarenko goes on to explain the fourth type of relationship across the crime-terror continuum - the *black hole*, focusing on "situations in which weak or failed states foster the convergence between transnational organised crime and terrorism, and ultimately create a haven for the continued operations of convergent groups" (Makarenko, 2004). In this scenario, the state becomes a "black hole" in which the organisation can leverage the conditions of a weak or failed state to expand and thrive without fear of repercussion from authorities (Makarenko, 2004; Korteweg, 2008).

The “black hole syndrome” describes an environment that serves as the perfect foundation for the formation and evolution of the crime-terror nexus. The “black hole” is generally associated with a geographically defined area that lacks governance and security, and where illegal organisations control the economy and people (Makarenko, 2004). The “black hole syndrome” promotes the ideal scenario for the crime-terror nexus manifestation, where the rule of law is absent, creating an environment that enables crime and terrorism to develop and flourish. The convergence of crime and terror networks in black hole areas preserves the insecure conditions of a region where groups attempt to gain control of economic or political power through violence and involvement in a wide range of criminal activities (Makarenko, 2004; Korteweg & Ehrhadt, 2006; Korteweg, 2008; Vianna de Zevedo & Pollak Dudley, 2020).

The “black hole syndrome” is particularly relevant to understanding the formation of the crime-terror nexus. The US 9/11 Commission Report (2004, p. 366) noted that “to find sanctuary, terrorist organizations have fled to some of the least governed, most lawless places in the world”. The Quadrennial Defense Review conducted by the US Department of Defense (2006) underlined the role of these areas, pointing out that “They [terrorists] exploit poorly governed areas of the world, taking sanctuary where states lack the capacity or the will to police themselves.” Although precise definitions of these black hole areas are debatable and highly controversial (Campana & Ducol, 2011), at the most basic level they share the notion that in such places, the rule of law is extremely weak and law enforcement agencies are therefore unable to counter the illegal activities of these groups.

Napoleoni (2004, p.187) describes black holes as “regions within weak states where the central authority has ceased to exercise any power […]”. These areas are characterised by lawlessness, allowing the crime-terror nexus to develop efficiently while the state fails to show its authority and successfully implement the rule of law. Kaldor (2003) argues that “it is these long-running conflicts in Afghanistan, the Middle East or parts of Africa that produce ‘black holes’ of lawlessness, extremist ideologies and endemic insecurity. Moreover, it is in the ‘black holes’ that the culture of violence is nurtured.” Similarly, Korteweg and Erhardt (2006) describe black holes as “a geographic entity where, due to the absent or ineffective exercise of state governance,

criminal or terrorist elements can deploy activities in support of, or otherwise directly relating to criminal or terrorist acts including the act itself".

The increasing number of fragile and weak states characterised by an ineffective criminal justice system, the ineffective rule of law, and corruption, provide an ideal sanctuary for the formation and development of the crime-terror nexus (Shelley, 2014). According to Rotberg (2004, p.1), states are considered failed "when they are consumed by internal violence and cease delivering positive political goods to their inhabitants". For a terrorist organisation whose survival has become largely dependent on illegal activities, it is important to be able to conduct its activities without the outside meddling of law enforcement agencies. Fragile or failed states, whatever their degree of failure or fragility, offer this because of the incapacity of the government to exercise the rule of law and to control (at least parts of) the state. This, in turn, allows terrorist organisations and criminal groups some degree of freedom and security, where they can operate undisturbed.

From an international law perspective, a failed state has three decisive characteristics (Bianic et al., 2003, p.15): the absence of bodies efficiently representing the state, intensive violence, and the need for humanitarian intervention. Similarly, 'weak' or 'fragile' states are defined as countries that lack the vital capability and/or will to achieve four sets of critical government responsibilities: fostering an environment favourable to sustainable economic growth; establishing and maintaining legitimate, transparent, and accountable governmental institutions; safeguarding its citizens from violent conflict; and meeting their basic human needs, ensuring protection of their human rights (Rice & Patrick, 2008). When these conditions are not met, the "black hole" areas provide a suitable environment where terrorism and organised crime can converge easily, with little to no government interfering, and where these groups can capitalise on institutional weaknesses to conduct illegal activities.

As the spectrum of interaction between terrorist organisations and criminal groups converges, it becomes more challenging to separate the two, with both criminals and terrorists adopting the practices of their counterparts. This can lead to

criminals or terrorists transforming into one or the other type of organisation. Makarenko's crime-terror continuum shows the continually changing landscape of interaction between criminal and terrorist groups and their activities, highlighting the unpredictable level of interaction between the two. Makarenko's (2004) continuum also points out an essential link between terrorism and areas characterised by a certain degree of lawlessness and governmental weaknesses. The "black hole syndrome" suggests that state failure can create an environment where terrorists and criminals alike can conduct their activities and build fruitful partnerships without law enforcement interference. Nonetheless, this does not imply entirely that the crime-terror nexus can develop in any weak or failed state. Still, instead there are certain factors that facilitate the formation of the crime-terror nexus regardless of whether the state is fragile, failed, collapsed or not, and this research aims to identify these factors in the following chapters.

3.4.4 The Crime-Terror Nexus: From Convergence to Hybrid Interaction

Continuing to discuss possible forms of interactions in the crime-terror nexus, Shelley et al. (2005) identify five types of interactions: activity appropriation, nexus, symbiotic relationship, hybrid, and transformation. *Activity appropriation* occurs when the groups adopt the other's methods without actually collaborating or working together (Shelley et al., 2005). However, this interaction does not demonstrate a solid connection between the groups; it only highlights how approaches can be employed with relative ease. In some cases, the groups may form a *nexus* interaction, where terrorist groups come into regular contact with organised criminal groups to accommodate demand, for example, to acquire counterfeit documents or launder funds. Al Qaeda, for example, has been documented as a terrorist group engaged in criminal activities such as money laundering and fraud (Freeman, 2012). The *nexus* interaction facilitates the development of a *symbiotic relationship* between organised criminal groups and terrorist organisations. Shelley et al. (2005) argue that through a long-term nexus, the two will engage in deeper relations and eventually form a *symbiotic relationship* interaction: a relationship of mutual benefit or dependence. Studies show that terrorist organisations could, when opportune, secure the services

of criminal groups in favour of their political goals (Roth & Sever, 2011; Picarelli, 2006; Gallagher, 2016; Boeke, 2016).

On the other hand, the nexus interaction can be hindered when a terrorist organisation cannot find a criminal group willing to engage in a business relationship with, because it sees no benefit in working with people outside their organisation. In this context, it is worth mentioning that researchers are questioning the existence of a nexus between organised crime and terrorism and overlook that these groups cooperate (Picarelli, 2006). Organised criminal groups and terrorist organisations, more often than not, view each other with suspicion. The lack of trust between such groups can deter their cooperation. Moreover, both groups are generally risk-averse and would be reluctant to accept the additional risks associated with a long-term collaboration. Organised criminal groups sometimes hesitate to partner with a terrorist organisation as this could bring unwanted pressure from law enforcement agencies. Similarly, terrorist groups are reluctant to cooperate with narcotics syndicates, as any involvement in illicit crimes such as drug trafficking, for example, could affect their image by portraying them as mere criminals, not following a political goal but pure material interests (Picarelli, 2006).

There are also instances when the terrorist organisation may engage in what Shelley et al. (2005) describe as a *transformation*. In this case, the terrorist organisation tends to completely engage in criminal activities, as the ideological objectives are overshadowed by profits. For example, rather than entering partnerships with Irish criminals and gangs, the Irish Republican Army used its own members to engage in criminal acts. These included smuggling livestock and cars, running protection and extortion rackets, managing underground brothels, and engaging in fraud and money laundering (Dishman, 2001). Research shows that members of PIRA were also known to “ride shotgun” or provide an armed escort on international drug shipments (Clarke, 2016). Similarly, in the early 1980s, the Medellin cartel launched an indiscriminate campaign of violence against Colombian leaders and citizens. A group called the “Extraditables”, consisting of drug traffickers, declared total war on Colombian government in opposition to an extensive crackdown by the law enforcement agencies (Dishman, 2001).

Finally, *hybrid* interaction results when “two groups continue to cooperate over a long period and members of the organised crime group begin to share the ideological goals of the terrorists [...] grow(ing) increasingly alike, and finally they merge.” (Shelley et al., 2005, p. 37). A *hybrid* organisation engages in criminal activities, but at the same time, it follows a political agenda. For example, the Taliban have used extreme violence in their attempt to eliminate what they consider threats to their ideology. Although they have a clear religiously motivated goal, they are equally proficient in organised criminal activities, particularly in the heroin trade and controlling commerce corridors while collecting taxes on shipments passing through their territory (Acharya et al., 2009; Rashid, 2010; Clarke, 2016).

Previous studies have reported the hybridisation and the transformational path of both criminal and terrorist organisations (Rosato, 2016). There is a consensus amongst academics that criminals and terrorists appropriate each other’s activities, exchange knowledge, and, in the process, form a nexus (Makarenko, 2004, 2011; Shelley & Picarelli, 2005; Wang, 2010; Grabosky & Stohl, 2010; Schmid, 2018; Ruggiero, 2019). As the two groups work together on a more regular basis, they begin to share each other’s practices and techniques, forming a symbiotic relationship that in time leads to the two groups merging into a hybrid or in some cases, leads to a transformation in which a crime or terror group assumes the other’s identity.

In essence, while there are different perspectives as to what the crime-terror nexus encompasses, Shelley (2014, p.1) points out that the “interaction of crime, corruption, and terrorism is having a tremendous impact on both security and the global economy”. The literature offers an extensive selection of notions that aim to understand the complexity of the crime-terror nexus. The interaction between the two groups is sometimes only temporary as an alliance; sometimes, it is solid and permanent as convergence and in some cases, the groups transform into a single entity. Nonetheless, it is essential to acknowledge that the crime-terror nexus is not uniform across the globe, but that it rather varies across countries and time. Depending on these circumstances, these groups might or might not establish working partnerships and cooperate in conducting illegal activities. Similarly, groups that establish contact might decide not to engage with each other because of lack of trust

or because such interactions would bring too much pressure from law enforcement agencies. Nonetheless, the groups can share tactics and motivations so much that they start displaying shared characteristics simultaneously and potentially transform, severely impacting international security (Puttonen and Romiti, 2020). Therefore, this research aims to critically analyse how these hypotheses are relevant when examining the involvement of state-sponsored terrorist organisations in a crime-terror nexus. Research suggests that Hezbollah – the case study of this thesis - is no longer a regional terrorist organisation but a hybrid crime-terror group with a global reach, enabling access to multiple criminal networks and providing opportunities for profit, which in turn has created new challenges for the law enforcement agencies (Azani, 2013; Realuyo, 2014; Ottolenghi, 2019b). Hezbollah has progressed from depending mainly on its state sponsor to diversifying its web of activities to include drug and arms trafficking, human trafficking, cigarette smuggling, diamond trading, money laundering, fraud, and intellectual property crime, creating particular alliances and points of convergence in the Tri-Border Area (Realuyo, 2014).

3.5 Hezbollah - The Convergence of Terrorism and Crime

Hezbollah is one of the most sophisticated global terrorist organisations in the world (Levitt, 2013; Oseran & Cohen, 2014; Ottolenghi, 2019b). Its onset can be traced back to the early 1980s, in the aftermath of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon (Constanza, 2012). The ongoing insecurity caused by a civil war in Lebanon and the appealing revolutionary ideology delivered by Iran's leader Ayatollah Khomeini gave birth to Hezbollah (Constanza, 2012). Since its inception in 1982, Hezbollah has proven to be an organisation of global reach, growing its global network, planning and conducting lethal terrorist attacks and raising significant sums of money annually through illicit activities. The organisation has cells on every continent, not only in the Middle East but also in the US, Latin America, Canada, Asia, and Europe (Carmi, 2017; Levitt, 2013; 2019; Duheaume, 2020).

Although Hezbollah was founded almost 40 years ago, there is much debate about what the organisation is exactly. For some, Hezbollah was regarded as "the A-Team of terrorist groups"; for others, Hezbollah represents the Lebanese Shia freedom

fighters, a resistance movement against Israel's occupation (Levitt, 2003; Byman, 2003). Irrespective of its terror capabilities, under the leadership of Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah has also become a criminal organisation that enjoys widespread support in Lebanon, with strong ties to the Islamic Republic of Iran and organised criminal organisations throughout the globe (Levitt, 2016).

Hezbollah can be described as a social movement that became deeply embedded within the Lebanese social and political fabrics. Not only this, but it has also been in the headlines for its active political and military support for the Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria (Realuyo, 2014). Before the 9/11 attacks perpetrated by Al Qaeda, Hezbollah was the terrorist organisation responsible for the most US fatalities (Kleck, 2011). The US and the European Union have designated Hezbollah's militant wing as a terrorist organisation and consider Hezbollah a global terrorist threat. Therefore, it could be argued that as an organisation, Hezbollah will be on the top of the agenda for a great while.

What makes Hezbollah a terrorist organisation worth investigating is its relationship with the Islamic Republic of Iran, described as "the most robust relationship between a state and a designated terrorist group in history" (Byman, 2008b, p. 172). Every aspect of the organisation is connected in one way or another to the Iranian government's leadership. Under a patron-client relationship, the Iranian government (hereafter referred to as 'Iran') has been funding Hezbollah since its formation and invested considerable sums in developing and strengthening the organisation's capabilities, from an estimated $70-$100 million per year in the 1990s to approximately $700 million a year in 2017 (Karam, 2018; Robinson, 2020). Hezbollah receives vast financial and political assistance, as well as weapons, training and safe haven, from its state sponsor. Although the state's officials never openly recognised the sponsoring of terrorism, Iran's support for Hezbollah is well documented in the literature (Levitt, 2005a; Levitt & Jacobson, 2008; Byman, 2008b; Malakoutikhah, 2018). Levitt (2005) estimates that Hezbollah gets closer to $200 million in support annually from Iran. Nevertheless, this estimate is probably relatively low, as other sources claim $400 million, or even $ 1.2 billion (Saad, 2012). However, this would not be accurate without mentioning the material and logistical support, and

the indirect funding Hezbollah receives from Iran in terms of training, personnel, supplies, and safe haven. Hezbollah's leader Hassan Nasrallah suggested that "Hezbollah's budget, its income, its expenses, everything it eats and drinks, its weapons, and rockets, come from the Islamic Republic of Iran" (Rafizadeh, 2016). Therefore, it could be argued that for over three decades, Iran has been providing financial, military, intelligence and advisory support to Hezbollah and has protected the terrorist group from international counter-terrorism actions (Byman, 2008b; DeVore, 2012; Shaw, 2019).

However, Iran's support for Hezbollah became problematic from an international perspective. Therefore, the international community imposed sanctions on Iran to weaken its financial capabilities to support Hezbollah (Malakoutikhah, 2018). These sanctions are based on the notion that if all financial support for a terrorist organisation can be disrupted, the organisation will be unable to follow its agenda, resulting in its collapse (Philippone, 2008). For example, the US sanctions under the 2017-2021 Trump administration have affected Iran's financial support for Hezbollah. Terrorism-related sanctions have been a part of the Trump administration's intent to put maximum pressure on Iran since the US left the 2015 Nuclear Deal, undermining Iran's ability to fund its proxy (Hubbard, 2019). During one of his visits to Lebanon, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo pointed out that "Our pressure on Iran is simple. It's aimed at cutting off the funding for terrorists, and it is working" (Hubbard, 2019).

3.5.1 Hezbollah in Latin America

With Iran undergoing devastating economic sanctions, Hezbollah became cautious of relying too heavily on its sponsor, exploring potential new funding methods. Operating a global terrorist network is costly. Therefore, Hezbollah has built a range of diversified streams of revenue that include the constant income stream of drug trafficking, money laundering, fraud and counterfeiting. Over the past decade, it has become evident that Hezbollah has become increasingly involved in criminal and illicit activities. There is evidence of Hezbollah's involvement in criminal schemes in Western Africa, particularly the illegal diamond trade (Al-Mousawi, 2012; Wege, 2012; Reback, 2013; Novello, 2017). Another alleged hotspot for Hezbollah is Latin America

in general and Tri-Border Area (TBA) in particular. As already noted, the TBA is a region where the frontiers of Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay meet. Although far away from Lebanon, Hezbollah's main base of operations (See Figure 3.3), this region is characterised by weak governance, and it is well known for being a hub for a large spectrum of illicit activities.

Figure 3.3: The Tri-Border Area in Latin America (Author's own)

The bombing of the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires on March 17, 1992, followed by the bombing of a Jewish community centre, the Argentine-Israeli Mutual Association (AMIA), on July 18, 1994, focused the attention of the Tri-Border Area countries, Israel, and the US on the region as the investigation into both attacks led back to Hezbollah operatives in the TBA (Trevisi, 2013; Realuyo, 2014; Nielsen, 2019). Argentinian prosecutors issued arrest warrants for two Lebanese citizens, Assad Ahmad Barakat and Imad Fayed Mugniyah, who were considered to have played a crucial role in financing the attacks. Since then, investigators have identified them as essential pawns in money laundering schemes (Levitt, 2016; Ottolenghi, 2019). Barakat, for example, operated Hezbollah's financial network in the region and owned several businesses engaged in money laundering activities to generate funds for the terrorist organisation, before being eventually arrested in Brazil (Trevisi, 2013; Levitt,

2016; Da Silva, 2018). Today, the Barakat clan reportedly remains active in the region, supporting Hezbollah's activities, which have picked up pace significantly in recent years (Nielsen, 2019). In July 2018, the Argentine Financial Information Unit identified their efforts to launder $10 million at a casino in Argentina (Da Silva, 2018; Nielsen, 2019). The Barakat clan is involved in smuggling, extortion, trafficking of weapons and narcotics, money laundering and terrorism financing (Constanza, 2012; Ottolenghi, 2020). Hence, the TBA's financial support networks that Hezbollah maintains in the region show that it is an organisation capable of operating globally (Kleck, 2011; Levitt, 2013; Ottolenghi, 2020).

Since the AMIA attack, terrorists in the TBA have mainly limited their activities to criminal fundraising in support of their terrorist agendas (Nielsen, 2019). The TBA has long been considered a hub for criminal activities, including but not limited to arms and drug trafficking, smuggling of illicit goods, counterfeited documents and currency, and money laundering (Kleck, 2011; Constanza, 2012; Da Silva, 2018). The geographical proximity of the three main cities in the TBA – the Brazilian city of Foz do Iguaçu, the Paraguayan city of Ciudad del Este and the Argentine city of Puerto Iguazú – enables the connection between criminal and terrorist groups, who exploit the porous borders and weaknesses of the local law enforcement agencies (Nielsen, 2019). In a crime-terror nexus relationship, Latin American "drug traffickers rely on terror organisations to move their merchandise to their final destinations in North America and Europe…[and] Hezbollah plays a role in this" (Ottolenghi, 2016). In a press release, the US Drug Enforcement Agency (2016) made this activity evident by stating that Hezbollah has "established business relationships with South American drug cartels…responsible for supplying large quantities of cocaine to the European and United States drug markets…[and Hezbollah] continues to launder significant drug proceeds as part of a trade-based money laundering scheme". The TBA remains one of the "regional nodes for money laundering and is vulnerable to terrorist financing" (US Department of State, 2018, p. 195).

3.5.2 Hezbollah in the Tri-Border Area: Significant cases

Evidence shows that since 2001, several sources have identified links between Hezbollah and the TBA (Levitt, 2013). The most prominent case is that of Assad Ahmad Barakat, the head of a powerful Lebanese family connected with Hezbollah in Argentina, who in 2001 established various front businesses used to launder funds from the TBA (Godberg, 2002; Ottolenghi, 2020). His base of operations was Galería Page (now called Galería Uniamérica) located in Ciudad del Este, Paraguay (Argentina Gob., 2018). In 2004, the United States sanctioned Barakat for using what was considered to be “every financial crime in the book, including his businesses, to generate funding” for Hezbollah (Ottolenghi, 2020). During an early investigation, a letter was found from Hezbollah’s leader, Hassan Nasrallah, addressed to Barakat, in which he congratulated him on his successful fund-raising efforts while acknowledging receipt of over $3.5 million (Goldberg, 2002; Costanza, 2012).

Assad Ahmad Barakat was arrested in Brazil in 2003, and then extradited to Paraguay for tax evasion, where he served a six-year prison sentence (Ottolenghi, 2018; 2020). In 2006, the US Treasury Department described him as a “global terrorist” and included his name on a list of people in the TBA who financed Hezbollah (BBC, 2018). After his release, Barakat lived in Brazil and conducted business activities in Paraguay, Argentina, and Chile (Reuters, 2018). In 2018, he was arrested by the Brazilian city of Foz do Iguaçu, after Paraguay issued an arrest warrant on identity theft charges (Reuters, 2018).

After his arrest, Argentina’s Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) froze the assets of 14 Lebanese citizens residing in the TBA who were part of a criminal organisation linked to Hezbollah and closely associated with the Barakat clan (Argentina Gob., 2018; Ottolenghi, 2020). The investigation showed that the network had transferred great amounts of money to Puerto Iguazú, Argentina, laundering the money through a local casino located just near the border crossing. Barakat Clan members were able to cross into Argentina from Brazil hundreds of times with large amounts of money, which they converted into gambling chips and back. For example, Barakat’s nephew, Hassan, crossed the frontiers 620 times between 2015 -2017, with 332 entries to

Argentina - an average of three entries per day, making numerous deposits at a casino located on Route 12 (ABC, 2019). Overall, the investigation led to three casinos used by the Barakat clan in an extensive money-laundering scheme regarded as “a major financial artery to Hezbollah in Lebanon” (Levitt, 2013, p. 78; Misiones Online, 2018; La Nacion, 2018; Perfil, 2018). The police in Argentina have accused Barakat of laundering $10m (£7.6m) on behalf of Hezbollah at a casino in the Iguazú Falls area (BBC, 2018). The Financial Intelligence Unit’s action encouraged a process that led, one year later, to Argentina’s decision to designate Hezbollah as a terrorist organisation – a decision followed shortly after by Paraguay, in August 2019 (Ottolenghi, 2020).

Another key case is that of Wassim el Abd Fadel, a suspected Hezbollah member. In 2012, Paraguayan authorities detained Fadel and charged him with human trafficking, money laundering and narco-trafficking after a Paraguayan named Nélida Raquel Cardozo Taboada fell at Charles de Gaulle International Airport in Paris, France, carrying 1.1 kilograms of cocaine in her stomach (Levitt, 2013). The woman said that she had been hired in Paraguay by Fadel and had to arrive with the drug in Warsaw, Poland (Levitt, 2013). The woman had claimed that Fadel hired her as a drug mule, encouraging an INTERPOL investigation into Fadel’s finances (Krepinevich & Lindsey, 2013). Starting from this, the authorities discovered that he presumably is one of the main elements of a network that manages a complex money laundering scheme from Ciudad del Este and mainly collects revenues through drug trafficking (ICT, 2013). According to Paraguayan police, Fadel had gained control of an entire Hezbollah-backed real estate and drug market in Ciudad del Este and deposited the proceeds of narco-trafficking and pirated music and movies into accounts owned by individuals connected to Hezbollah in banks in Turkey and Syria (ABC, 2013; Krepinevich & Lindsey, 2013). According to Paraguayan police, Fadel allegedly deposited between $50,000 to $200,000 into these accounts per transaction, money used to fund Hezbollah training camps (ICT, 2013; Krepinevich & Lindsey, 2013). Fadel was part of an international drug trafficking network controlled from Isla Margarita, Venezuela, a Caribbean holiday destination that is also an infamous hub for South American drug cartels (ABC, 2013; InSightCrime 2019). After arresting

Fadel, INTERPOL and the Paraguayan police uncovered an international money-laundering and drug-smuggling network responsible for sending cocaine from South America to the US, Europe, and the Middle East, with some of the proceedings channelled to Hezbollah (ICT, 2013).

For years, Hezbollah has successfully leveraged collaboration with criminal groups to facilitate money laundering, weapons procurement and operational logistics (Levitt, 2020). In Brazil, Hezbollah has associated itself with Brazilian criminal factions, particularly the Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC) (Guerney, 2014). The PCC is considered to be the largest Brazilian criminal organisation. Founded in 1993 in prison, members of the PCC primarily operate in Sao Paulo but also in the Tri-Border Area. Investigations have linked the PCC and Hezbollah in drug trafficking operations: the PCC operates "in a kind of commercial partnership with Hezbollah, the Lebanese paramilitary organization, based in Beirut, more than 10,000 km from Brazil" (Campanema, 2018). Literature suggests that the two organisations are involved in "drug and arms trafficking, smuggling - of electronic products, cigarettes, clothing and fuel - and tax evasion. Everything negotiated and moved from the borders" (Campanema, 2018).

Reports produced by the Brazilian Federal Police indicate that Hezbollah members connected with members of the PCC to articulate routes of international drug trafficking and arms smuggling (Jusbrasil, 2014; Gurney, 2014). PCC runs cells in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, controlling transit routes between Bolivia, Paraguay and Brazil (InsightCrime, 2013). For example, in Bolivia, a kilogram of cocaine costs $10 000 Brazilian reals, which after transportation to Brazil doubles its value (Gazeta Digital, 2017). In the Middle East, the same kilogram is worth nineteen times more than in Bolivia, and Hezbollah is allegedly dealing with this. In return, the PCC launders money via Brazilian companies.

Moreover, it is argued that the relationship goes beyond narcotics, weapons and money laundering, as Brazilian criminals offer protection to Lebanese agents and act as logistic operators for Hezbollah, sending drugs through Brazilian ports to Africa, Europe, and the Middle East (Leali, 2014; Gazeta Digital, 2017). In return, Hezbollah

offers money laundering and logistics networks enabling the PCC to reach international drug markets, including many in Africa and the Middle East. For example, Hezbollah, with some members detained in Brazil, supplied weapons to Brazilian drug trafficking groups in exchange for “a favourable situation for foreigners within the prison system, in addition to ensuring some profit from negotiations even while they are in prison” (Desideri, 2019).

The links between PCC and Hezbollah became subject of interest after the arrest of Farouk Abdul Hay Omairi, a Lebanese citizen who was designated by the US Department of the Treasury for his links to terrorist groups (Infobae, 2006). Omairi lived in Foz do Iguaçu in Brazil, and was arrested in 2006 for running of a gang of cocaine traffickers, along with his son, Ahmad Farouk Omairi (Infobae, 2006). The two were accused of leading a cocaine trafficking network to Europe and the Middle East (Infobae, 2006). Brazilian authorities had been monitoring the Omairi family and their connections operating in the TBA for years, but the lack of anti-terrorism legislation in Brazil prevented their arrest. Therefore, instead of concentrating on terrorism financing, the law enforcement agencies focused on other illegal activities that are associated with this, such as money laundering, smuggling, and drug trafficking, which resulted in the arrest of Omairi (Coutinho, 2019). The arrest of Omairi and his son shows the criminal-terrorist association between PCC and Hezbollah. During their time in prison, the Omairi family was protected by members of the PCC, as an investigation conducted by the Brazilian Federal Police shows that a direct agreement was negotiated with Hezbollah (Coutinho, 2019). The partnership has since expanded, and research suggests that PCC and Hezbollah are involved together in drugs and arms trafficking (Coutinho, 2019). For example, Hezbollah brokered the sale of C4 explosives stolen in Paraguay and sold on the black market at very low prices (Leali, 2014; Coutinho, 2019). According to Brazilian Federal Police investigations, Hezbollah sells weapons to Brazilian criminal organisations and has access to PCC’s criminal services inside Brazil.

3.5.3 Hezbollah and the Rationality behind the Crime-Terror Nexus

Various assumptions have been developed over the years concerning Hezbollah's involvement in organised crime. Most of the literature on the terror-crime nexus suggests that economic needs are the motivating factor behind this and that these linkages have solidified in response to the decline in state sponsorship (Makarenko, 2004; Shaw, 2019). In Hezbollah's case, it could be argued that a state funding loss increased crime involvement. From the beginning, the organisation has benefited from Iranian support, whether it consisted of funds, weapons and other goods or safe haven (Byman, 2006; DeVore, 2012; Malakoutikhah, 2018). However, over the years, due to the impact of international sanctions and a drop in the price of oil, Iran has reduced its direct financial support (Malakoutikhah, 2018). As a result, it could be argued that Hezbollah needed to diversify its financial revenues and insulate its budget from the impact of Iranian cutbacks. Nowadays, a large amount of funding comes from a wide range of criminal activities, from weapons trafficking, drugs trafficking, counterfeiting operations and money laundering (Levitt, 2016).

Hezbollah's involvement in crime could be a result of its need for funding. Faced with financial insecurity from affiliates in Iran, Hezbollah has turned to criminal activities. They have formed alliances in multiple countries in Latin America; Hezbollah has created a criminal network of drug trafficking with some of Mexico's most well-connected global criminal organisations (Valencia, 2014). One association that has received particular attention is the Los Zetas drug cartel in Mexico. Los Zetas is one of the most dangerous and powerful drug cartels in Mexico (Logan, 2012; Beittel, 2013; Correa-Cabrera, 2017). The partnership has allowed both groups to gain insights into new fields of operation (Rosenthal, 2013). On the one hand, Los Zetas adopted terrorist tactics such as car bombs and propaganda, being the first of the drug trafficking organisations to implement Islamic State-like terrorist tactics and savagely behead many civilians to send a message and to airdrop propaganda leaflets (Hesterman, 2013, p.171). On the other hand, Hezbollah are actively engaged in money laundering and drug trafficking from which they earn massive capital. It is believed that this nexus resulted in the laundering of between $850 and $900 million (Valencia, 2014). Moreover, in Hezbollah's case, a growing "business relationship"

with cartels has allowed the organisation to develop networks and increase its presence in the US (Judicial Watch, 2013, p. 1).

It could also be argued that it was not only the need to secure funding outside its state sponsor but also that Hezbollah capitalised on the opportunities provided by the TBA (Shaw, 2019). The pervasive corruption in the area amounts to what has been described as a "permissive environment" for criminal fundraising (Ottolenghi, 2017). Hezbollah has seen the opportunity in making the TBA a hub for their illegal operations because the uncontrolled illicit economy in the region has allowed them to create different streams of revenue through diversified criminal enterprises (Da Silva, 2018). Moreover, trans-border identity networks facilitate crime (Shaw, 2019). Levitt (2013, p. 78) explains that "Hezbollah traces its origins in Latin America back to the mid-1980s…when its operatives set up shop in the tri-border area…a natural home for operatives to build financial and logistical Hezbollah support networks within existing Shi'a and Lebanese diaspora communities". In recent years, Hezbollah's growing need to generate revenue to compensate for the lack of material support from Iran heightened their involvement in illicit activities, including drug trafficking and money laundering on behalf of local criminal organisations (Ottolenghi, 2019).

3.5.4 Hezbollah and its Web of Alliances

Although Hezbollah and the organised criminal groups of Latin America have distinct agendas and are motivated by different goals, they also share several similarities. Most notably, they operate within the boundaries of states, yet their activities run undisturbed due to the inability of the local governments to challenge their power. State weakness plays a similar role in Hezbollah's transnational operations, with the TBA being described as a "terrorist black hole" (Korteweg, 2008). With the steady financial support provided by Iran, Hezbollah developed a long-term perspective of its aims. One reason for this is that the organisation managed to pay the personnel regular salaries, which enabled it to attract and retain large human capital (DeVore, 2012). However, Iran's financial crisis appears to undermine its support for Hezbollah: with less sponsorship from Iran, Hezbollah has had to cut the salaries of its fighters, putting pressure on the organisation (Hubbard, 2019).

This Tri-Border Area became a pivotal part of Hezbollah's international financial network in the 1990s, as the existence of a prominent Lebanese diaspora allows them to engage in criminal activities and plan terror attacks from this region, as observed in the case of the 1992 and 1994 attacks in Argentina (Kortewg, 2008). Corruption plays an important role here, too, as the TBA provides a haven where organised crime and the corrupt officials who accept their bribes form a symbiotic relationship that flourishes around drug and weapons trafficking, money laundering, and other profitable criminal activities. State weakness and corruption undoubtedly play an important role in Hezbollah's operations in this region, although it is worth mentioning that they have carried out criminal activities in resilient and more developed states (Levitt 2011; 2013; 2020). Nonetheless, this region in particular, is highly vulnerable to the criminal penetration and establishment of illegal networks, and therefore it could be argued that it is also susceptible to terrorism.

Hezbollah takes advantage of loosely regulated border territory in the TBA and the vastly unregulated free trade zone suitable for exploitation (Levitt, 2016). Being able to draw on networks in producing, transit and consumption countries in Latin America allows Hezbollah to become an important partner due to their transnational identity network. Hezbollah's position as an organisation with global reach allows them access to international criminal markets, which provide generous opportunities for profit. For example, the US Drug Enforcement Agency found evidence of an international supply chain, with the Lebanese diaspora facilitating cocaine smuggling networks connecting Latin American producing countries to the US and Europe, channelling financial revenues into Hezbollah (Meyer, 2017; Realuyo; 2014).

For organised criminal groups, Hezbollah is an important partner, which offers them an opportunity to expand their reach without having to build a criminal infrastructure in distant places. Hezbollah benefits from supporters in diaspora communities across the globe, which provides organised criminal syndicates with resourceful channels to distribute their illegal products to distant markets, bringing back the profits through complex money-laundering schemes (Ottolenghi, 2019). The network of Ayman Joumaa provides another noteworthy example of suspected Hezbollah criminal activities. Joumaa was involved in large-scale drug trafficking and

money laundering, working in partnership with drug cartels from Mexico and Columbia. Ayman Joumaa was described as one of the leading Hezbollah supporters, while Hezbollah was presented as a “drug cartel” (Solomon, 2013).

Today, Hezbollah pursues the services of organised criminal groups to facilitate its own entry into a global organised criminal enterprise. From narcotics to international used car sales, and from fraud and counterfeiting to money laundering, there is evidence of numerous cases where the Hezbollah-affiliated criminal operatives are acting as enablers for many crimes (Levitt, 2016). Hezbollah’s success is based on its capabilities to form relationships with organised criminal actors, which allows the organisation to develop its influence in new regions, as well as to diversify its revenues’ portfolio (Noriega, 2013; Levitt, 2013; Da Silva, 2018; Ottolenghi, 2019). Noriega (2013) points out that “Hezbollah conspires with drug-trafficking networks in Mexico and Central and South America as a means of raising and laundering funds, sharing tactics and reaching out and touching US territory”. The interaction between Hezbollah and organised criminal groups produces a serious threat; “This emerging combination of threats comprises a hybrid of criminal-terrorist, and state and non-state franchises, combining multiple nations acting in concert, and traditional TOCs and terrorist groups acting as proxies for the nation states that sponsor them” (Farah, 2012, p. 83).

Over the years, Hezbollah has evolved into a global organisation with a wide array of capabilities and connections that allow it substantial operational reach and flexibility. The lesson to be learned here is that Hezbollah is no longer limited in scope to politics and conflicts in the Middle East. It is a threat that must be recognised everywhere, with countermeasures needed on a global scale. The international community can no longer identify Hezbollah as simply an Iranian proxy and terrorist organisation alone; it has become a powerful military force engaged in lethal terrorist activities and complex criminal and money laundering activities. To effectively counteract Hezbollah’s criminal and terrorist operations requires a deeply accurate understanding of how the organisation has evolved since its establishment and how its involvement in the crime-terror nexus has facilitated its growth.

Since its inception, Hezbollah has thoroughly demonstrated its lethality and skill in terms of terrorist actions. However, by focusing exclusively on this, law enforcement agencies miss on how much it has evolved over the past two decades—an evolution that has transformed both the nature of its threat and the countermeasures necessary to combat it. The TBA offers Hezbollah potential financial sources, access to illegal arms, and a population from which to recruit new members. While the Tri-Border Area is not a main concern in the Global War on Terrorism, it should be regarded as a significant pillar in the strategy to combat international terrorism.

3.6 Summary

The emerging nexus between organised crime and terrorism is a complex phenomenon of a global nature, constantly changing and developing. The evolving relationship between terrorism and organised crime poses significant challenges to the international community due to definitions of terrorism and organised crime which are often disputed (Hoffman, 2006; Grabosky and Stohl 2010; Paoli 2014; Von Lampe 2016; Schmid, 2018). Therefore, it is not surprising that neither one of these concepts are difficult to analyse and account for. This chapter argues that overall, the boundaries between terrorists and criminals are serious and thus cannot be ignored. By critically analysing a number of key theoretical models that have been developed by academics which have an application to the study of relations between organised crime and terrorism, this chapter argues that there is no doubt that the nexus formed between organised crime networks and terrorist organisations is an extremely disconcerting phenomenon (Williams, 1998; Makarenko, 2004; 2011; Hutchison & O'Malley, 2007; Byrne, 2009; Wang, 2010; Shelley, 2014; Rosato, 2016; Shaw & Mahadevan, 2018; Sumpter & Franco, 2018; Ruggiero, 2019; Kreiman & Espadafor, 2019).

Overall, this literature review critically analysed, evaluated, and compared prior research studies and other scholarly sources in an attempt to understand and critically assess the factors that drive the crime-terror nexus in relation to state-sponsored terrorist organisations. First, this literature review provided a critical analysis of the definition of terrorism and state sponsorship. For the purpose of this thesis, state-

sponsorship is regarded as the provision of financial assistance by a state to a designated terrorist organisation, using the relationship between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Hezbollah as a case study.

Second, the literature review presented the links between terrorism and organised crime, and delved into theoretical frameworks that explain the crime-terror nexus and how this develops over time. Third, it provided basic knowledge about Hezbollah as the main focus of this thesis and critically assessed the specificities of the organisation, arguing that this group has evolved, combining terrorist and criminal activities to achieve its objectives. By examining the various theoretical frameworks that examine the crime-terror nexus, this chapter provides compelling explanations of the interaction of crime and terrorism in the case of Hezbollah. This research argues that Hezbollah is a hybrid organisation that has the ability to transform either into a criminal or terrorist group, depending on the circumstances it finds itself in. As mentioned throughout this chapter, the Islamic Republic of Iran provides most of Hezbollah's weapons and funding; it sends the organisation around $700 million per year (Sly & Haidamous, 2019). As a terrorist organisation ideologically tied to Iran, Hezbollah managed to benefit from the support of its state sponsor for decades. When financial support from Iran was significantly reduced due to sanctions, Hezbollah turned to organised crime as a major source of revenue to ensure its survival and continuity, which theoretically explains the convergence of crime and terrorism. Hezbollah has been fluctuating between the two, and has become a serious security concern that raises a tremendous threat to international security. To sum up, as Makarenko (2011, p. 238) argues, "The better an organisation learns and adapts to its environment in the context of the crime-terror nexus, the greater the threat it is likely to pose on a multiple of levels". Hence, the greater need to study and better understand this nexus in relation to Hezbollah.

The following chapter outlines a detailed description of the research methods adopted in this study, providing information regarding the various stages of the research and explaining the methodologies used in data collection and analysis. It justifies the approach adopted in this research, taking into consideration the ethical implications and limitations of this study.

CHAPTER 4: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapters provide an extensive literature review based on a synthesis of various sources related to the topics of terrorism and organised crime. However, this research cannot be over-reliant on secondary literature, as one of the main methodological criticisms assigned to terrorism studies is that researchers largely rely on secondary data sources of analysis produced by other researchers (Jackson, 2007; Gunning, 2007; Schuurman, 2020). Primary data sources might generate new insights and areas of analysis (Smyth, 2007). Therefore, in order to advance academic knowledge, this research involves the collection of primary data through field research. Although this practice has been regarded as necessary and crucial, it has also been described as inherently difficult and dangerous due to the sensitivity of researching terrorism and organised crime (Dolnik, 2013; Baird, 2018). Despite these assumptions, over the years scholars have argued that such assumptions are unfounded (Silke, 2004; Dolnik, 2013; English, 2016; Youngman, 2020). According to Silke (2004, p. 13) “the idea that terrorism research is inevitably highly dangerous and risky is mistaken”. Nonetheless, through a prior understanding of the issues involved in researching this sensitive topic, the researcher managed to anticipate likely developments and to adjust accordingly.

This study is concerned with the convergence of terrorism and organised crime, placing particular focus on Hezbollah in the Tri-Border Area. The objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To understand and critically assess the factors that drive the crime-terror nexus concerning state-sponsored terrorist organisations;
2. To investigate the specificities of Hezbollah and to examine why the TBA facilitates the formation of the crime-terror nexus;
3. To investigate the decision-making process behind Hezbollah’s operations in the TBA and evaluate their involvement in organised criminal activities;

4. To explore the factors that hinder the countermeasures against the crime-terror nexus in the TBA.

This chapter presents the methodology and methods used in this study. It includes the research design of this study, the data collection and data analysis methods that are most suitable for addressing the objectives of this thesis. The chapter discusses in detail the various stages of developing the methodology of the current study, including a comprehensive discussion of the philosophical foundations of the research method chosen. Also, the chapter outlines the methods, which were used by the researcher to effectively conduct fieldwork whilst satisfying the standard ethical requirements demanded by Coventry University Ethics Committee. The chapter discusses the steps used to manage danger in fieldwork through a fieldwork safety review process, during which the researcher anticipated and identified potential risks, and developed an appropriate risk identification and mitigation risk assessment for Coventry University Ethics Committee.

This chapter also provides an insight into the data collection strategy, together with the selection of participants and the data collection process. It ends with a discussion of the analysis tools used to analyse the collected data. The research objectives, the reliability and validity of this study, and ethical considerations are also highlighted in this chapter.

4.2 Research Approach - Philosophical underpinnings

Research shows that there are various research methodologies, often with different epistemological and ontological positions (Creswell, 2014; Taylor, Bogdan & DeVault, 2016). The methodology is regarded as the “strategy, plan of action, process or design” behind the choice and use of particular research methods (Crotty, 1998, p.3). Meyrick (2006, p. 801) notes that often there is a “polemic debate, pitting quantitative research against qualitative”, while Hammersley (1996, p. 164) believes that the selection between qualitative and quantitative approaches “requires judgment according to the situation and purpose, rather than a judgment based on a commitment to one or another competing philosophical view of the world”.

Nonetheless, the choice of research methodology reflects the nature of the research problem (Noor, 2008; Creswell, 2014; Dawson, 2019).

To accomplish the aims and objectives of this study, the researcher employed a qualitative research approach. Due to the complexity of the research, qualitative methods provide the most suitable approach for this study. A qualitative study is appropriate when the goal of the research is to explain a phenomenon by relying on how individuals perceive their experiences in a given situation (Stake, 2010). This study employs a qualitative approach to investigate "the intentions, motives, meanings, contexts, situations and circumstances of action" (Minichiello et al, 2008, p.5) - in this case, investigating the crime-terror nexus concerning state-sponsored terrorist organisations. A qualitative approach was adopted as it provides "valuable insights into how people construct meaning in various social settings" (Neuman, 2006, p.308).

4.2.1 Ontological and Epistemological Approaches

Ontology refers to the "nature of reality, and the assumptions researchers have about the way the world operates and the commitment held to a particular view" (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 110). Applying a constructivist ontology within this qualitative method of inquiry allows for the study of the "how-and sometimes why-participants construct meanings and actions in specific situations" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 130). Bryman (2008, p.19) points out that constructivism

> […] is an ontological position that asserts that social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors. It implies that social phenomena and categories are not only produced through social interaction but that they are in a constant state of revision.

This ontological position fits the purpose of the study, as this research investigates the crime-terror nexus as an undergoing and ever-changing phenomenon. Moreover, this study adopts an interpretivist epistemology as this

accepts that the world and the meaning associated with different phenomena are continually changing (Chowdhury, 2014). This epistemological perspective assumes that any effort to comprehend social reality has to be based on understanding individuals' experiences of that social reality (Chowdhury, 2014). Therefore, this research aims to understand the social reality of the crime-terror nexus, and to construct theories and models from data through qualitative methods (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002).

The paradigm of this study includes a constructivist ontology and an interpretivist epistemology, which underpinned the research process, as well as the methods and data collection of this study (See Figure 4.1).

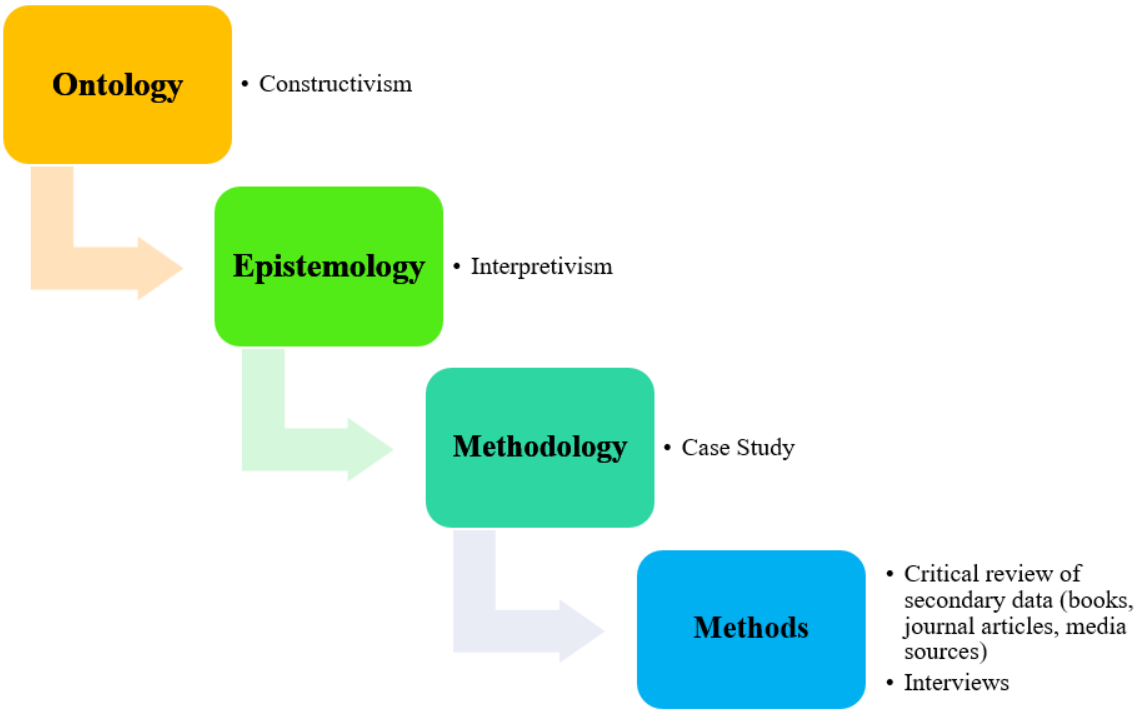

Figure 4.1: The Interpretivist Paradigm of this study

4.3 Research Design

The research design refers to the “procedures for collecting, analysing, interpreting and reporting data in research studies” (Creswell, 2007, p.58). The research design presents the methods that have been applied to collect and analyse the data. Robson (2002) points out that based on the purpose of the research, there are three possible forms of research design: exploratory, descriptive and explanatory. For example, the purpose of a descriptive study is to deliver a depiction of a situation, person or event, however, descriptive studies cannot explain why a phenomenon has occurred, which is what this research aims to achieve (Punch, 2005). Therefore, this has not been considered fit for this research. Similarly, exploratory research is conducted when there is not enough information about a phenomenon or if the phenomenon has not been clearly defined (Saunders, et al., 2007). Its purpose is to tackle new phenomena that have not been previously investigated (Brown, 2006). Again, this is not the case for this study, as previous research has been conducted on the crime-terror nexus, as proven by the extensive literature review presented in this research.

Unlike the previous forms of research design, the explanatory aims to explain and justify the descriptive information. Therefore, while descriptive studies may ask ‘what’ kinds of questions, explanatory studies seek to ask ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions (Yin, 2014). It builds on exploratory and descriptive research and aims to identify concrete reasons as to why a phenomenon takes place – in this case, the involvement of state-sponsored terrorist organisations in a crime-terror nexus. Explanatory research looks for underlying factors and motivations and provides evidence to support or contest an explanation; similarly, this research aims to understand the factors that have triggered the involvement of Hezbollah in organised crime in the TBA, aiming to provide comprehensive explanations of the crime-terror nexus. This explanatory research is conducted to discover, critically analyse and report the relationships between different aspects of the phenomenon under research.

4.3.1 The Case Study Approach

To address the research questions of this study, this thesis used the following qualitative research methods: a case study and semistructured interviews, all strongly supported by empirical data collection. Case studies have been used in various fields such as education, business, law, public policy, health, and social sciences (Crowe et al., 2011; Yin, 2014; Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Sturman (1997, p. 61) defines a case study as a "general term for the exploration of an individual, group or phenomenon". Simons (2009, p. 21) describes a case study as "an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, program or system in 'real-life'". This methodology proved to be adequate for this research, as it provides an in-depth, multi-faceted exploration of the crime-terror nexus. The aim of writing this research is to provide insights into an under-researched element of the crime-terror nexus - the involvement of a state-sponsored terrorist group in organised criminal activities, emphasising Hezbollah as a case study.

The case study method enables a researcher to closely examine the data within a specific context. In most cases, a case study method selects a small geographical area or a very limited number of individuals as the subjects of study. This is particular relevant for this study, as the geographical area of study is the Tri Border Area of Latin America, and the subject of study is Hezbollah, a state-sponsored terrorist organisation. The case (Hezbollah) is a complex functioning unit due to its contemporary links with its state sponsor, Iran, which makes this case study unique and worth investigating in the particular geographical context of the TBA.

Case studies offer a better insight into the phenomena, providing concrete context-dependent knowledge (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Andersen & Kragh 2010). This approach helps in the exploration of the crime-terror nexus within some particular context through various data sources to reveal multiple facets of the phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Case study research, therefore, represents a valuable qualitative approach where "the larger question is to understand the wider social phenomenon of which it is a case" (Richards & Morse, 2013, p. 76). This offers additional insights into what gaps exist in researching this phenomenon and why this

phenomenon occurs (Ridder, 2016). In turn, this helps develop or refine theory related to the crime-terror nexus, and Hezbollah in particular as the researcher "examines, in-depth, many features of a few cases over time … [carefully selecting] one or a few cases to illustrate an issue and analytically study it (or them) in detail" (Neuman, 2006, p.40).

To extrapolate critical ideas that help predict future trends in the involvement of state-sponsored terrorist groups in organised criminal activities and to provide a means for understanding this issue with greater clarity, this research utilises an explanatory, single-case, case study (Yin, 2014). This aims to understand the crime-terror nexus concerning state-sponsored terrorist organisations. This research focuses on Hezbollah as a case study, as evidence shows that its relationship with Iran is "the most robust relationship between a state and a designated terrorist group in history" (Byman, 2008b, p. 172). Therefore, considering the well-documented level of support provided by its state sponsor (Levitt & Jacobson, 2008; Byman, 2008b; Katulis, 2018; Malakoutikhah, 2018), this research aims to understand the factors that forced the organisations to engage in a crime-terror nexus and to analyse the convergence of the two phenomena.

This approach involves careful and in-depth consideration of the nature of the case, historical background, physical setting, and other institutional and political contextual factors (Stake, 1998). For this research, this approach is relevant as it helps with the exploration of the crime-terror nexus in the physical setting of the TBA, allowing for the careful consideration of the elements that facilitate the development of the crime-terror nexus in the region. A hallmark of case study research is the use of multiple data sources, a strategy which also enhances data credibility (Yin, 2003). To ensure a holistic understanding of the phenomenon being studied, the data sources included in this thesis comprised of an extensive literature review and primary data collected from semi-structured interviews. Triangulation provided an important way of ensuring the validity of case study research. Each data source was regarded as "one piece of the puzzle", with each piece contributing to the researcher's understanding of the phenomenon under study. Information is explored in relation to the case study environment for a more thorough examination of the given phenomenon (Algozinne &

Hancock, 2006). The convergence of data sources added strength to the findings of this research as it promoted a greater understanding of the case study.

Potential advantages of this single case study are seen in the thorough portrayal and analysis to gain a better understanding of 'how' and 'why' a phenomenon happens (Yin, 2014). Stake (2010, p. 25) observed that there can be many explanations of a phenomenon and that as qualitative researchers, one cannot be sure or confident when offering explanations. Stake (2010, p. 25) also points out that "whether we are quantitative or qualitative researchers, we do need to search for causes, for influences, for preconditions, for correspondences", recognising that the researcher's interpretations of the data "stand not as proof but as persuasion of one meaning more than another".

Case study research has been criticised for a lack of clarity in its design and methods and a lack of generalisability and rigour (Liamputtong, 2013). However, it provides a way of exploring phenomena in-depth, adding "new understandings and meanings" which in this case helps towards a better understanding of the involvement of state-sponsored terrorist groups in organised crime (Liamputtong, 2013, p.215). As it focuses on "particularisation, not generalisation" (Stake, 1995, p. 8), or what Abma and Stake (2014, p. 1150) refer to as "universalism", this individual case study offers the opportunity to learn about and provide an in-depth analysis of the research topic. Looking at Hezbollah's involvement in organised crime in the TBA adds depth to the motivations, situations and circumstances, which enabled the crime-terror nexus without losing the "intrinsic value of the case" (Abma & Stake, 2014, p. 1150). At the same time, the case study method highlights the complexity of this particular case and promotes learning from it, as it looks at the points of convergence between crime and terrorism and aims to provide future recommendations for research (Abma & Stake, 2014). Erickson (1986) argues that since the general lies in the particular, what can be derived from a specific case can be applied to similar situations. The usefulness of the case study method is further emphasised by Yin (2009, p. 4) explaining that "as a research method, the case study is used in many situations, to contribute to our knowledge of individual, group, organisational, social, political and related phenomena". The usefulness of the case study is highlighted in this statement, as the

nature of Hezbollah's involvement in organised crime represented an influencing aspect in the development of the research design.

Case study research design also aims to identify the gaps in the existing theory and to develop theoretical explanations (Ridder, 2016). In this case, looking at the under-researched element of state-sponsored terrorist organisations' involvement in organised crime. By adopting a single case study research, this study had the opportunity to look at the deeper causes of the phenomenon, leading to the identification of patterns and relationships, creating and testing various theoretical explanations as to why this phenomenon occurs (Gomm, Hammersley & Foster, 2000; Fiss, 2009; Yin, 2014). This approach allowed the researcher to grasp a better understanding of the crime-terror nexus concerning Hezbollah in the TBA, looking at the motivating factors behind the formation of this nexus (the "why") and the facilitating factors that allow the nexus to occur (the "how") by analysing the first-hand experiences and perspectives of the participants.

This research aims to discover justifications for the existence of a crime-terror nexus between state-sponsored terrorist organisations and organised criminal groups. Research into this topic is by its nature affected by ethical challenges and dilemmas. Despite the growth of dangerous fieldwork in recent years, there are methodological challenges to studying certain aspects of terrorism, usually related to the researcher's attempts to uncover the attitudes, motivations and intentions of terrorists (Silke, 2004; Dolnik, 2011; 2013; Horgan, 2011; Altier, Horgan & Thoroughgood, 2012). There are also challenges related to the covert and secretive status of terrorist organisations, which creates obstacles when researching their involvement not only in terrorist activities, but also in organised crime. Since the topic of this thesis covers dangerous field work related to terrorism and organised crime, the risk of victimisation for both researcher and participants is high, therefore serious considerations have been given to conducting dangerous fieldwork (Baird, 2019).

Given that this research was conducted during the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, where travelling across continents was restricted, these physical risks have been reduced as the researcher conducted the research online.

Nonetheless, methodological considerations related to protecting participants from potential harm arising directly from their involvement in research (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012). As pointed out by Silke (2004, p. 49), knowledge is the most dangerous thing to possess. Moreover, another factor of genuine concern is the personal safety of the researcher (Baird, 2019). Although no physical travel is involved, research on terrorism and organised crime is inherently dangerous to the researcher (Baird, 2019). An example from 2003 shows that a neo-Nazi extremist group – Combat 18 – had managed to identify a list of researchers from a university web page and messaged them, referring to them as "the enemy" (Silke, 2004, p. 13). The risk of this happening is low; however, it has been considered during the research process.

Horgan (2004) argues the idea that research on terrorism is highly dangerous and risky is mistaken, although evidence shows that there have been previous rare examples where researchers have been killed in the field, such as PhD student Giulio Regeni in Egypt in 2016 (Walsh, 2017; Kington, 2020), or physically attacked (Moreno, 1995; Mahmood 2008). However, Silke (2004) points out that meaningful research can be accomplished in a feasible, productive and safe manner. The following sections show different steps the researcher has taken to collect systematic and reliable information that satisfy the aims and objectives of this study in a safe manner.

4.4 Research Methods

Research methods are defined as "the techniques or procedures used to gather or analyse data related to some research question or hypothesis" (Crotty, 1998, p.3). There are no precise methods of data collection or analysis, which are exclusive to the case study enquiry. Instead, researchers are using "whatever methods seem to them to be appropriate and practical" (Bassey, 1999, p.69). The principal techniques of collecting data in this study were through qualitative interviews. Interviews encompass the contexts, particular situations, nuances, and so on, which helped with the accomplishment of this study's objectives.

Mason (2002) identifies three types of qualitative interviews: in-depth, semi-structured and unstructured. Each type is based on an "interactional exchange of

dialogue", having a relatively informal style, being "thematic, topic-centred, biographical or narrative" with the purpose "to ensure that the relevant contexts are brought to into focus so that situated knowledge can be produced" (Mason, 2002, p.62).

The semi-structured interview is selected as the primary research instrument best to deliver a comprehensive examination of the crime-nexus topic. Compared with the structured interview, it provides greater scope for discussion, examining and gathering more information about the phenomenon. Semi-structured interviews facilitate the ability to gather information to achieve the research goals of the study (Galletta, 2013). Between the two, this facilitates a better understanding of the point of view of respondents and getting inside information. Moreover, semi-structured interviews enable the participants to provide a more detailed account of events and allow the researcher to probe interesting areas, which emerge from the data. When considering the focus of this study concerning the convergence of crime and terror, quantitative methods were not deemed suitable as these assume a fixed and measurable reality, while the literature shows that the crime-terror nexus is a flexible, ever-changing phenomenon (Byman, 2005b; 2008; 2020; Maogoto, 2003; Collins, 2014).

As this research was conducted during the COVID-19 global pandemic, it was important to consider the need "for a more fluid, dynamic conceptualisation of fieldwork" and researchers had to adopt a flexible approach in order to prepare for "unforeseen challenges" (Billo & Hiemstra, 2013, p. 324). This had been particularly relevant during the COVID-19 pandemic, as the researcher had to adapt the fieldwork to suit a remote research context. Hence, the researcher decided to adopt a flexible research approach and conduct interviews in an online environment using video conferencing software (Skype, Zoom) to replicate the face-to-face interviews. However, some participants did not feel comfortable discussing this research online mostly because they felt that their spoken English was not satisfactory. They asked whether they could write the answers instead. Therefore, alongside online face-to-face interviews, this research also used e-mail interviews to achieve its aims and objectives. This method had been used successfully in previous qualitative research

and it had been proved a vital tool for achieving this research's aims and objectives (Gibson, 2010).

The email interviews offered a number of advantages (Bampton & Cowton, 2002; Meho, 2006; Gibson, 2010). Firstly, they allowed interviewing participants who could not express themselves as well in talking as they did in writing (Meho, 2006). This allowed the participants to respond to questions freely, without worrying about any stigma associated with their answers. The interview guide was sent to them via email, regardless of their time zone or location, which allowed the participants to take their time in formulating their answers. The researcher ensured that the questions were clear to avoid misinterpretation but stimulating to motivate participants to delve deeper into the research topic and follow-up questions were added to the list (Meho, 2006). This also saved a significant amount of time allocated for transcribing the interviews, as data was generated in electronic format and required little editing or formatting before analysis (Gibson, 2010).

However, the researcher understands that there are several disadvantages of email interviews, starting with the limited literature on the practicalities, approaches, challenges and ethical issues of this method (Burns, 2010, p.11). Particularly, the participants had a longer period to reflect and write a response, creating the potential for 'fake' responses and a lack of spontaneity (Gibson, 2010, p.2). The e-mail responses were carefully examined in order to identify "richness" of the data, as well as links with the literature and other participants' responses to ensure that no fraudulent responses were received that could alter the quality of this research. Moreover, email interviews lacked some of the social cues that contribute to a full understanding of the participant's experience (Gibson, 2010). In addition, the responses took several days or weeks to be completed and sent back, which created stress and time constraints for the researcher (Meho, 2006).

Nonetheless, employing a familiar and relaxed communication mode for data collection encouraged greater participation in this study, as participants felt more comfortable to express their experiences freely and honestly via e-mail, without worrying about any stigma, apprehensiveness or anxiety, at their own pace. E-mail

interviews proved to be highly advantageous to this research, alongside face-to-face interviews.

4.4.1 Designing and conducting semi-structured interviews

This section explains the steps employed to design and conduct semi-structured interviews for this research (see Figure 4.2).

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Figure 4.2: The steps employed to design and conduct this research (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019)

The scope of this study was to examine the convergence of terrorism and organised crime by looking at Hezbollah's activities in the TBA. This primary objective was based on an extensive review of the literature and previous research findings, and it was developed in response to an identified gap – the involvement of state-sponsored terrorist groups in organised crime. The researcher constructed this case study using a systematic approach, and sufficient data was collected for the researcher to be able to:

- explore important characteristics of the case study;
- generate truthful explanations of the findings;
- test for the trustworthiness of these explanations;
- make a valuable argument;

- relate the discussion to relevant literature;
- present the argument in a valid and reliable manner ;
- provide an audit trail by which other researchers may validate or challenge the findings of this research (Bassey, 1999, p.65).

4.4.2 Developing the interview guide

The semi-structured interviews used in this study were “organised around a set of predetermined open-ended questions, with other questions emerging from the dialogue between interviewer and interviewee/s” (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p.315). The semi-structured interviews were based on an interview guide, represented by a presentation of questions or topics that had to be explored by the interviewer (see Figure 4.3). The questions in the interview guide comprised of core questions that were supplemented by follow-up questions, dependent on the interviewee’s responses. All questions were neutral, clear and avoided leading language. The open-ended questions were used to achieve detailed descriptions of the topic being examined, while the follow-up questions were used to encourage further explanation on the topic.

TYPE OF QUESTION	EXPLANATION	RATIONALE	EXAMPLE
Starting questions	General questions related to the context of research	▪ Initiate the conversation ▪ Help the participant feel comfortable	Can you tell me a bit more about your professional experience?
Core questions	8 number of questions that relate directly to the research topic	▪ Answer the research questions	Why do you think the TBA is "attractive" for Hezbollah? What initiatives exist to tackle this phenomenon in the TBA?
Planned follow-up questions	Specific questions that ask for more details about aspects of the core questions	▪ Answer particular aspects of the core interview questions ▪ Obtain greater detail about responses	Based on your experience, what kind of criminal activities do Hezbollah engage in? **Are they profitable?**
Unplanned follow-up questions	Questions that arise during the interview based on participant responses	▪ Answer particular aspects of the participant response ▪ Obtain greater detail about responses	What do you think are the factors that play an important role when it comes to the lack of cooperation between the governments? What role do you think corruption plays?

Figure 4.3: Interview Guide

As Galletta (2013, p. 45) explains, "semi-structured interviews incorporate both open-ended and more theoretically driven questions…reflecting the researcher's deliberate progression toward a fully in-depth exploration of the phenomenon under study". Using the literature, the researcher identified several factors likely to help shape the crime-terror nexus and used these as a base to develop questions that explore broad themes based on these factors. The open-ended questions examined

different facets of the crime-terror nexus and state-sponsored terrorist organisations. Semi-structured interviews provided the opportunity to adjust the order of the questions so that the respondents could expand their ideas and speak in great detail about the research topic. The interview guide can be inspected in Appendix 1. As the interview guide indicates, the questions asked were relatively broad and formulated in such a way to allow participants to express their opinions freely and to develop new meanings in the context of the topic (Galetta, 2013).

4.4.3 Planning the Logistical Aspects

Considering that this research was conducted throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, during the preparation phase of this study, the researcher planned and carefully thought about the best ways to contact potential participants, obtain their consent, arrange interview times (and convenient locations), and test interview equipment. The researcher decided that initial contact with the participants should be done via email and followed up with more details so the individual can make an informed decision about their participation in the study. Therefore, the researcher devised an email template stating the purpose of the study, the aims and objectives, why the participants had been selected, and what to expect during the interview (See Appendix 2). The researcher also provided them with a Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form (See Appendices 3 and 4).

Audio recording of the interviews was considered an appropriate technique so that the interviewer could concentrate on the discussion and build rapport with the participant without being distracted by note-taking (Edwards & Holland, 2013). The researcher considered that interviews should be recorded to allow for an in-depth analysis of the data to be conducted. For this research, two recorders were used - one as the primary recorder and one as an auxiliary – to prevent any malfunctions of the equipment, which could result in losing the recording. This also allowed the researcher to be more receptive during the process due to the sensitivity of the issues discussed.

The researcher recognised that analysing audio recordings is not ideal and therefore decided that the interviews would be transcribed word for word from the audio recording. This allowed referring to the exact terms used by the participants in

this study during the analysis phase. To ensure that the transcription of the information is of high quality and free of errors, all transcripts were checked against the original interview recording. This was extremely helpful, as the researcher made necessary amendments and re-familiarised the data, which assisted in the data analysis process. The data generated via email interviews required slight editing and formatting before analysis (Gibson, 2010). Section 4.7 of this chapter explains the steps taken in terms of data analysis and coding.

4.5 Ethical Issues and Considerations

The COVID-19 pandemic has created a complex but opportunistic environment for this research. Conducting this study during a pandemic has provided exceptional insights into research approaches for this research. Initially, the researcher planned to travel to Argentina – one of the TBA countries, and investigate Hezbollah's activities in that region by crossing the borders into Brazil and Paraguay; however, the pandemic restricted international travel; moreover, with the particular Brazilian variant of COVID-19, the researcher considered the health and safety concerns of herself and the participants in this study, if travel to the TBA was allowed. Hence, the researcher adapted to these challenges not only by conducting the interviews online (via online platforms such as Skype, Zoom, and Google Meet) and via email, but also by focusing on participants from the TBA, as well as interviewing experts that have investigated this issue over the years, although not based in the TBA, including the United States (US), Israel, Mexico, Lebanon and the United Kingdom (UK). This created the opportunity for well-rounded research where various perspectives were accessed, compared and contrasted, keeping things in perspective by connecting ideas to understand the relationship between the different aspects of the crime-terror nexus concerning Hezbollah.

Although the researcher conducted online and email interviews, the ethical issues were considered the same as in face-to-face interviews (Janghorban et al., 2014). The ethical position adopted for this study was based on respect for truth and respect for the participants in order to ensure the credibility of this study (Bassey, 1999). Trustworthiness is a crucial aspect and researchers must "be truthful in data

collection, analysis and the reporting of findings" (Bassey, 1999, p.74), a position that was intensely practiced throughout this study by comparing and contrasting the various perspectives of those involved, and also with the literature on which this study is based on.

Research is always influenced by a variety of factors, including those associated with the research process as a whole and the researcher's position and influence. Through reflexivity, the researcher acknowledges that field research is about much more than just data collection. The process of conducting interviews not only has a role in deepening the researcher's understanding and knowledge about the crime-terror nexus, but also about the realities and contexts in which the actors involved operate. Moreover, the exposure to everyday realities changed the researcher's perception of crime and terrorism. In simple terms, one can read and analyse all available resources on the linkages between terrorism and organised crime. Still, by being exposed to the environment in which these linkages occur and the experiences of those who deal with this phenomena daily, the researcher gained much more knowledge that otherwise would simply not be aware of, which is extremely important to share with the broader audience.

During the data collection process, the researcher ensured that the interview respondents understood the purpose of this research and that their answers would be treated confidentially (Bryman, 2001, p.318). Voluntary consent was secured before the interview via Informed Consent, and the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants were protected to ensure that no harm was caused to participants during or after the interview process. Approval was sought and gained to conduct the research inquiry from Coventry University, Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations. The Ethical Certificate is attached at the beginning of this study.

4.5.1 Recruitment of participants

To ensure this research provides a vast insight into the involvement of state-sponsored terrorist organisations in the crime-terror nexus, participants were sought from various disciplines. To triangulate and cross-reference responses, the researcher interviewed a cross-section of people. The study included academics, policymakers

and practitioners, carefully identified and selected through purposive sampling. This technique involves identifying and selecting individuals with particular knowledge or experience about the subject of study (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011). This sampling method was intended to maximise efficiency and validity. The main aim of purposive sampling was to focus on particular characteristics of individuals that are of interest, and whose knowledge allowed the researcher to answer the research questions. Purposive sampling allowed the researcher to select participants that have knowledge about the research topic. The interview participants were mainly those who could significantly contribute to the study; therefore, the selection was purposeful rather than random. Therefore, the initial sample included individuals who have "expert knowledge" and "a first-hand, current involvement" in dealing with the crime-terror nexus in the TBA (Spradley, 1979, p. 49).This ensured the collection of the opinions of counter-terrorism and organised crime experts who were expected to be knowledgeable on the research themes. It must be acknowledged, however, that there were instances where the initially selected participant refused to take part in the interview for various reasons but offered to nominate other potential participants. Snowball sampling was also a purposeful method of data collection in this study, as it provided a means of accessing more participants by utilising the social networks of already identified respondents (Atkinson & Flint, 2001).

Nonetheless, when approaching participants, issues related to their background and their positions were taken into consideration, acknowledging that gaining access can be problematic. As Mikecz explains, "interviewing elites represents unique methodological problems when compared to non-elite interviews. Gaining access to elites is hard enough; gaining their trust and building rapport with them is even more difficult" (2012, p.482). By providing them with an Introductory Letter and an official copy of the Ethical Certificate from the Research Centre, an important level of trust and credibility was established.

Dexter (1964, p.557) suggested that junior researchers should avoid interviewing elite members because they are "ill-prepared" and "needlessly take up the time of important persons". This could be the case when considering the number of potential participants that refused to engage in this research. Hence, when

corresponding with elite members, the researcher asked when it would be most convenient for them to connect, showing flexibility to fit in with their schedule.

The researcher was as open as possible with their research goals and attempted to instil trust and a common understanding about what they hope to achieve. The researcher recognised that the power dynamics between the interviewer and participants can have direct implications on the type of knowledge that is created (Conti & O'Neil, 2007). Despite her position, the researcher aimed to maintain a critical stance throughout the research, and gave them an opportunity to speak with uncharacteristic honesty. Although being aware of relations of power, the researcher aimed to disregard these and focus mainly on the information gathered and its reliability. As Rice (2010, p.74) pointed out, these "relations of power … place researchers in the difficult position of having to maintain positive relations with those they are studying, whilst developing critical perspectives from the empirical material they have obtained". The researcher was aware that the participants can provide the official company position rather than their personal opinion, or sometimes direct the narrative off a tangent. In such instances, cross-checking and triangulating different kinds of evidence (literature, other interviews) was an important form of verifying the reliability of the data.

The total sample, as illustrated in Table 1, consisted of a broad range of research participants from diverse backgrounds, and varying viewpoints and experiences about the research topic. This also allowed to test for triangulation by looking at the level of agreement between participants. A total number of 25 people were interviewed (See Table 4.1):

Table 4.1: Details of research participants

Participant No.	Main field of occupation	Location (Country)
1	Law Enforcement	Argentina
2	Analyst	United States

3	Analyst	Argentina
4	Academic	United Kingdom
5	Analyst	United States
6	Analyst	Argentina
7	Academic	Brazil
8	Academic	Brazil
9	Academic	Argentina
10	Academic	Brazil
11	Analyst	United States
12	Law Enforcement	Argentina
13	Academic	Lebanon
14	Academic	United States
15	Law Enforcement	Brazil
16	Law Enforcement	Argentina
17	Analyst	United States
18	Law Enforcement	Brazil
19	Analyst	Mexico
20	Academic	Israel
21	Law Enforcement	Brazil
22	Law Enforcement	Brazil
23	Academic	Argentina
24	Law Enforcement	Brazil

25	Law Enforcement	Lebanon

The key ethical considerations for this piece of research are informed consent and the protection of the identity of individuals. At the initial stages, communication was established via email, and the participants were forwarded the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form at least a week before the interview. This allowed them to familiarise themselves with the details of the research, the contact details of the researcher and the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, as well as the exit procedure, should they choose to withdraw from the research at any point. Security measures have been taken in line with Coventry University's policy on data protection to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of all the participants in this study.

4.5.2 Risk to participants and researcher

The researcher conducted the interviews based on informed consent, which assured the anonymity of all the participants involved. The researcher also stated that the right of withdrawal from the study and the right to refuse to answer any of the questions remains an option for participants at all times. No vulnerable individuals were involved in this study. Nonetheless, if participants became anxious or upset at any point during the interview, the researcher would stop immediately and ask them whether they wished to continue.

Conducting empirical research on a volatile topic such as the crime-terror nexus also carries an element of risk to the researcher. According to the Social Research Association (SRA, 2001), there are several risks, which are to be considered when conducting empirical research:

- risk of physical threat or abuse;

- risk of psychological trauma as a result of actual or threatened violence or the nature of what is disclosed during the interaction;

• risk of being in a compromising situation in which there might be accusations of improper behaviour;

• increased exposure to the risks of everyday life and social interaction, such as road accidents and infectious illness; and

• risk of causing psychological or physical harm to others.

The risk of any physical harm to the researcher was mitigated as the researcher conducted interviews online without needing to travel to the Tri-Border Area. Nonetheless, there is a possibility that researchers could be exposed to emotional risk (Campbell, 2004). Research work can be emotionally draining, leading to researcher burnout (Dickson-Swift et al., 2006). In order to avoid this, the researcher had access to professional supervision and support, which provided her with the assistance required to undertake this research and also the opportunity to develop their skills base as a researcher. Moreover, to avoid burnout, the researcher left enough time between interviews to process harmful information and to familiarise better with the data.

4.5.3 Positionality

Positionality "reflects the position that the researcher has chosen to adopt within a given research study" (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013 p.71). This concept influences both how research is conducted, its outcomes, and its results (Rowe, 2014). Savin-Baden & Major (2013) identify three primary ways that a researcher may identify and develop their positionality. First of all, the researchers must locate themselves in relation to the subject and acknowledge personal positions that have the potential to influence the research (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). In this particular research, the researcher came across the topic of Hezbollah's activities in Latin America during her postgraduate studies, where it was found that the organisation has links with organised criminal groups in Mexico, i.e. Los Zetas cartel. This sparked an interest in this area of study, due to the lack of available materials investigating these relationships. The researcher did not bring any preconceptions into the project, wanting to investigate this topic and how the crime-terror nexus forms. Especially due to the fact that this is

an under researched area, this thesis was regarded as an enlightening process that allows for the testing and confirmation of phenomena.

Secondly, the researchers must locate themselves in relation to the participants, considering how they view themselves, as well as how others view them (Savid-Baden & Major, 2013) . For the purpose of this research, the researcher sees herself as an outsider, a 'neutral' investigator (Agar, 1996). 'Outsiders' arguably hold the advantage of not belonging to a group and therefore are more objective and better able to observe behaviour (Fonow & Cook, 1991). This allowed the benefit of observing phenomena with fewer preconceptions, allowing the researcher to investigate the topic with 'fresh eyes.' Although the researcher had extensive knowledge of the topic gathered through an extensive literature review, however, the researcher recognises that she lacked the lived experiences of the insiders (participants), and that is was crucial to build a relationship with them in order to emerge with the same depth of understanding regarding the phenomenon investigated. Although the researcher was familiar with the topic under study through conducting an extensive literature review, it was imperative to gather first-hand experiences and views of the participants.

Thirdly, the researcher should be locating themselves about the research context and process, acknowledging that research will necessarily be influenced by themselves and by the research context (Savid-Baden & Major, 2013). Hence, the researcher attempted to solidify her role as an outsider during interviews. It was essential that she did not interfere with the research environment, in order to observe the most authentic version of events offered by the participants in the study. The researcher aimed to comprehend the social phenomenon from the participants' own perspectives (Taylor, Bogdan & DeVault, 2016, p.3).The researcher's attempt to be an outsider during interviews was met with participants re-establishing her as an insider at times, due to the knowledge she gathered through an extensive review of literature. Nonetheless, the researcher kept an open-minded attitude and avoided any preconceptions derived from literature when interviewing participants, assuming that she knows little about the phenomenon being studied in order to gather the most accurate information. Throughout the research project, the researcher maintained the

ability to be open, honest, profoundly interested in the experience of the research participants, and committed to accurately representing their views and experiences.

4.5.4 Limitations of this study

As mentioned previously, one of the significant limitations of this study was the global COVID-19 pandemic, as this restricted the ability of the researcher to travel to the TBA. This limited the ability to meet the participants face to face, and in turn, the interaction had to be conducted via online platforms/emails. This resulted in the data collection process to take longer. Not only the researcher had to schedule the interviews via online platforms such as Zoom, Skype or Google Meet, but it was also necessary to follow up the email interview responses and constantly remind the participants that these are needed for the completion of this study.

The researcher acknowledges that no matter how well prepared, events do not necessarily develop according to plan. Although the researcher contacted eighty possible participants, only twenty-five agreed to participate in this study. On multiple occasions, after initial contact, possible participants agreed to be involved; however, contact could not be further established online or via email. Some participants refused to get involved due to reasons such as lack of time, positive COVID-19 results, they did not want to comment on this topic, or have not engaged in a further discussion at all after initial contact. Fortunately, the researcher requested some of those who refused to participate in recommending someone else who could provide their input in this research and in some cases, this has been fruitful.

Another significant limitation of this study is that no participants from Paraguay agreed to be involved. Only one participant in this study had previous experience working briefly in Paraguay; however, they currently reside in Argentina (Participant 12). This constitutes a challenge of this study. Although the researcher has made multiple attempts to engage with participants from Paraguay, they either refused or, if they initially agreed, no further contact had been established via email or online platforms. The researcher acknowledges that it would have been instrumental to have some participants from Paraguay, as this would have reduced the potential for inaccuracies, as well as providing insights from alternative perspectives about the

crime-terror nexus in the TBA. Nonetheless, to address this limitation, the researcher approached a wide range of participants from various backgrounds who provided a fascinating account of the crime-terror nexus in the TBA.

Another limitation of this study is that it focuses solely on Hezbollah in the TBA. This single case study perhaps limits to a certain extent the generalisability of the findings. Nonetheless, the contribution of this particular case study to knowledge is characterised by a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, carried out through the interpretation of participants' experiences, and supported by the literature presented in the previous chapters of this thesis. Despite these limitations, the present study has enhanced the understanding of the crime-terror nexus, and it will stimulate further investigation of this important area.

4.5.5 Data Protection and Information Storage

In line with the University's Data Protection policy, recorded material and other electronic data were stored on password-protected devices. Transcripts of the interviews will be stored for up to 5 years on password-protected devices. Following this period, data will be destroyed.

4.5.6 Conducting the interview

The interviewer adopted a friendly and non-judgemental attitude during the interview, maintaining a warm and conversational tone. The researcher aimed to convey a sense of being in the interview together and to help ease any discomfort by being friendly and respectful to the participants (Josselson, 2013). This ethical attitude incorporated respect, sympathy and diplomacy toward participants throughout the research process. Moreover, the researcher employed active listening, which is "attentive, empathic, non-judgmental, and listening in order to invite, and engender talk" (Josselson, 2013, p. 66).

At the beginning of each interview, the researcher reminded participants about the research aims and objectives and what the research focuses on, reiterated that all interview information was confidential, described the nature of the discussion and how

the interview is structured, and asked permission to record the conversation. The participants were allowed to withdraw at any stage during the process and have any materials they had produced destroyed. Participants were given copies of the interview transcripts to read and comment upon or request changes to be made if they thought these were an inaccurate representation of their account.

The original interview schedule comprised of eight main questions exploring different topics related to the research questions. The interviewer used planned and unplanned follow-up questions that invited further clarification, exploration or elaboration on the subject. As the interview progressed, “the goal of the interviewer is to encourage the interviewee to share as much information as possible” (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 317). Follow-up questions were just as crucial to the core questions during the interview. The researcher used various probing techniques to encourage the respondents to carry on elaborating on particular responses to ascertain more details needed to understand the topic (See Figure 4.4). As Taylor and Bogdan (1984, p.88) state, “Far from being an impersonal data collector, the interviewer … is the research tool”. Adopting the role of the researcher as summarised by Neuman (2006, p.406), the interviewer “asked questions, listened, expressed interest, and recorded what was said”.

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Figure 4.4: Probing Techniques (Bernard, 2000)

4.6 Reliability and Validity

Reliability, validity and generalisability are subject to debate in the academic community (Stake, 1995; 2010; Neuman, 2006; Liamputtong, 2013; Creswell, 2014). In this section, the researcher establishes her credibility as a researcher, addressing the issues of reliability and validity of this study and ending with a discussion around the generalisability of this research.

For the purposes of this research, the researcher drew firstly upon her academic record. To ensure the validation of this study, the researcher created a clear and traceable audit trail for the entire research process (O'Donoghue, 2007, p.100). This ensures the trustworthiness of findings and confidentiality, ensuring that recordings are indexed and stored securely. Moreover, the researcher was accountable for sharing the transcripts with research participants and allowing them to add any other details or correct misconceptions, which avoided and cleared any misunderstandings. Finally, the researcher kept a research diary of reflections to maintain critical reflexivity.

To ensure the quality of this study, the researcher made sure that the research is:

- contributory in producing broader knowledge about the crime-terror nexus;
- rigorous in conduct through a systematic collection, analysis and interpretation of data – both primary and secondary;
- credible, as it offers substantial and feasible arguments about the importance of the data generated based on the experiences of those involved and by linking those to the literature.

Nonetheless, there is extensive debate around the generalisability and validity of research and how a single case can generate data that applies to other situations. Because the case study of this research focused on a single unit – i.e. Hezbollah, the issue of generalisability looms larger than with different types of qualitative research. However, much can be learned from a particular case. Shields (2007, p.13) supports this argument and points out that:

> The strength of qualitative approaches is that they account for and include difference--ideologically, epistemologically, methodologically--and most importantly, humanly. They do not attempt to eliminate what cannot be discounted. They do not attempt to simplify what cannot be simplified. Thus, it is precisely because case study includes paradoxes and acknowledges that there are no simple answers, that it can and should qualify as the gold standard.

To ensure the reliability of this study, the researcher took specific actions as follows:

- the interview procedure (the timing, content, etc.) was discussed clearly;
- the sampling criteria/sample are explained in detail;
- the interview questions are prepared and integrated into the annexe part of this study.
- during the data collection process, efforts were made to reduce any inaccuracies and bias. Before ending the interview meetings, the researcher checked the data's accuracy by discussing the participants' arguments and getting their feedback.

4.7 Data analysis

This section provides an overview of the qualitative analysis strategies used in this study. Unlike quantitative analysis, which is the process of collecting and analysing numerical data independent of the researcher, qualitative data is difficult to measure and quantify. In contrast to quantitative research, where hypotheses are formed and are then applied to multiple cases, qualitative research uses inductive reasoning and is based on the researcher's inductive and analytic skills and knowledge of the particular context within which the phenomenon occurs.

4.7.1 Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software

The researcher used computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software to manage the large amounts of data gathered during the interview phase. This helped to assist with the data analysis process, enhancing this study's rigour. After the transcription of interviews into Microsoft Word, data was stored and managed using specialist software for qualitative data (NVivo). This software allowed for qualitative inquiry beyond coding, sorting and retrieving data (Wong, 2008). It should be noted, however, that this software only managed the data and assisted the researcher in handling it more efficiently; however, it was not an alternative to the researchers' time, effort and skills as the process of analysing the data was entirely the researcher's task.

4.7.2 Thematic analysis

For the purpose of this study, the researcher used thematic analysis, a qualitative research method used across various epistemologies (Nowell et al., 2017). It provides a flexible approach that can be adapted to the requirements of different studies, and it gives a complex and detailed account of data (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). This analysis was used to examine the perspectives of different research participants, highlighting points of convergence and divergence and generating insights into the crime-terror nexus in the TBA (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During this process, the researcher identified patterns across the data set and associated them with this thesis' research questions. As shown in Figure 4.5, during this process, the researcher initially familiarised herself with the data gathered during the interviews by reading the transcripts and searching for meanings and patterns.

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Figure 4.5: The thematic analysis process (Nowell et al., 2017)

Firstly, the researcher familiarised herself with the data by reading through the transcribed interviews before beginning coding, engaging with the data to gain detailed insights into the phenomenon being explored and identifying patterns and ideas that could be generated into codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). By immersing herself in the transcripts, the researcher took notes on each interview, identifying recurrent topics across the data set relevant to the research questions of this study. Interview transcripts were then uploaded into the data management software NVivo.

Secondly, the researcher produced initial codes from the data, which allowed the identification of specific characteristics of the data systematically throughout the entire data set (Castleberry & Nolan, 2018). The preliminary coding process using line-by-line analysis assisted in building further data categories for a detailed thematic analysis. For example, when analysing responses to interview Question 3 (Why do you think the TBA is “attractive” for Hezbollah?), initial codes such as “the jungle”, “rivers”, “airport” etc. were collated in order to build further data categories.

Thirdly, the researcher organised all the coded data into sub-themes that captured noteworthy material related to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This phase involved collating, re-naming, and refining the initial codes into broader categories of codes. Similarly, in relation to Question 3, the codes previously

mentioned were collated in relation to a general area they refer to, i.e. “geographical attributes”. Each sub-theme was further developed by considering its importance to the broader research question and also to provide a relationship between the codes in order to create a logical chain of evidence (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Data was coded in relation to the four research questions of this study and resulted in the generation of 16 sub-themes (RQ 1 – four sub-themes; RQ 2 – five sub-themes; RQ 3 – two sub-themes; and RQ 4 – five sub-themes).

Fourthly, after devising a set of sub-themes, the data went through a refining process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher reviewed the coded data extracts for each theme and analysed whether they formed a coherent pattern. The validity of each theme was carefully examined to determine whether they accurately reflected the meanings that appeared in the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). At the end of this phase, the researcher identified different themes, their relationship, and the overall image they present concerning the phenomenon studied by contrasting and comparing the themes to examine links and connections between these (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During this phase, for example, the five sub-themes that emerged for RQ 2 were further collated into only two themes.

During the fifth phase, the researcher determined what aspect of the data each theme captured (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During this phase, the researcher finalised the themes by determining a specific description that encapsulated the definitive patterns of meaning located in the data. Data extracts were selected to be used in order to illustrate the key features of the themes presented. Overall, the researcher determined four major themes and conducted a detailed analysis of each of them, considering how each theme relates to the research questions of this study. Finally, once the themes were fully established and critically analysed, the researcher began the write-up aiming to provide a comprehensive account of the data within and across themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

4.8 Summary

This chapter provides an in-depth discussion of the methods involved in this study’s research. The goal of this chapter was to outline the research method used to

answer the research questions. This study follows a qualitative research approach. A discussion of the procedure, research participants, data collection methods, and interview questions outlined the specifics of how this study was conducted. Because of the nature of the research, the researcher chose a qualitative strategy, bound by an interpretivist approach, which aimed to provide a complete, detailed insight into this research topic. The key research tool consisted of semi-structured interviews, where the participants were carefully targeted and recruited through a purposive sampling technique.

The research design of this thesis provides a solid platform to discuss Hezbollah's activities in the TBA. The researcher uses contemporary studies on fieldwork into terrorism and in dangerous environments to provide rigour to the data collection. The research design of this study has been adapted to a particular moment in global history – the COVID-19 pandemic. The researcher has developed a robust ethical framework to undertake this research.

The following chapter (Chapter 5) provides the reader with information on the TBA and Hezbollah's activities in the region, which allows for a better understanding of the background of this research. The analysis process and a discussion of the research findings of this study are then presented in Chapters Six and Seven.

CHAPTER 5: Context Chapter

5.1 Introduction

Building on the previous chapter, the qualitative case study methodology used for this study enables the researcher to conduct an in-depth exploration of a complex phenomenon within a specific context. In particular, this research looks at the Tri-Border Area (TBA) as a unique focal point for Hezbollah's activities. To emphasise the importance of this research and to enable the reader to understand the setting in which the research findings apply, it is necessary to position this study within the setting of the TBA, highlighting empirical material related to the crime-terror nexus concerning Hezbollah in that region. Firstly, this chapter presents the geographical characteristics

of the TBA, followed by a summary of the most significant cases that illustrate Hezbollah's presence and activities in the TBA. Lastly, this chapter presents some of the initiatives developed in the TBA aimed to counter the crime-terror nexus. This section provides information necessary to allow the reader to understand the background of the problem and the context in which the crime-terror nexus occurs.

The Iranian-supported terrorist organisation Hezbollah has quietly expanded and improved its capabilities into a wide spectrum of legal and illicit activities that offer it a unique position in the world (Levitt, 2020). As a terrorist organisation, it is evidenced that Hezbollah operates internationally (Levitt, 2020). Nonetheless, in 2020, evidence has shown that driven by financial pressures from increased sanctions and decreasing state support, Hezbollah has criminally diversified (Petrich, 2021). There are various reports, which suggest that Hezbollah has been active in almost every major Latin American country (Realuyo, 2014; Valencia, 2014; Constanza, 2012; Humire, 2020; Levitt, 2013; Sabatini, 2017; Sullivan & Beittel, 2016; Karmon, 2009). For example, in 2016, the United States (US) Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) arrested Hezbollah members who had been selling cocaine obtained from Colombian and Mexican drug trafficking organisations to gather funds and use them to purchase arms for use in Syria (Fernandez, 2020). The group has also been linked to amphetamine trafficking from Syria into Europe: in July 2020, Italian police seized a shipment of 14 tonnes of pills worth $1.1 billion (Warrick & Mekhennet, 2020; Sommerville, 2020). There is evidence that Hezbollah collaborates with drug-trafficking networks in Mexico and Central and South America to raise and launder funds, share networks and tactics, and "reaching out and touching" US territory (Noriega, 2013). As Noriega (2013) points out "to facilitate its activities in our neighborhood – including smuggling, money laundering, training and fund-raising – Hezbollah operatives collaborate with well-financed narcotraffickers and guerrilla groups with sophisticated societal, smuggling and money laundering networks in the region".

More specifically, Hezbollah is considered to be one of the "major terrorist organizations that exist in the Tri-Border Area… [that] are using cocaine trafficking to provide economic assistance to terrorist movements in the Middle East" (Charles,

2004). The discussion of this thesis is therefore restricted to this particular geographical enclave; this research does not compare or contrast the three countries, but critically analyses a geographic entity between their borders. Over the years, the TBA became famous for its drug trafficking, money laundering, recruiting, kidnapping, extortion, bribery, electronic pirating, murder, bombings, and plotting terrorist operations (StopIllegal, 2019; Potter & Lyman, 2011; Jacobson & Levitt, 2010; Financial Transparency Coalition, 2009; Hudson, 2003). Organised criminal syndicates, drug cartels, and terrorist organisations converge and are involved in these various activities (Hudson, 2003; Ramshaw, 2019; Levitt, 2013; Berti, 2008). As Shelley (2005, p. 105) opines, "The new transnational crime groups, often operating regionally, exploit porous borders and dysfunctional state institutions where territory is outside the control of the central state". This research argues that the collaboration between Hezbollah and organised criminal groups produces larger insecurities and it aims to understand how this emerging combination of threats occurs specifically in the TBA.

5.2 The Tri-Border Area

Before being able to explore the crime-terror nexus concerning Hezbollah, it is critical to understand the environment in which this nexus occurs. One of the flashpoints of Hezbollah's activities in the Western hemisphere is the TBA. Also known as, the Triple Frontier, the Tri-Border Area is an enclave where the frontiers of Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay meet. The area is comprised of three cities: Puerto Iguazú (Argentina), Ciudad del Este (Paraguay), and Foz do Iguaçu (Brazil) (See Figure 5.1). Throughout the literature, this region was often considered a crime hub for terrorist organisations, allowing them to operate unrestricted, including Hezbollah (Goldberg, 2002; Shelley, 2005; Kleck, 2011; Trevisi, 2013; Levitt, 2020). The cities of Foz do Iguaçu, Ciudad del Este, and Puerto Iguazú, are divided by two rivers, the Paraná and Iguazu. These geographic limits did not have any specific denotation before 1996, when the governments of the three countries began to refer to the area as the "Triple Frontera"– The Triple Frontier or the Tri-Border Area (Rabossi, 2004, p.24).

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Figure 5.1: The Tri-Border Area (Triangle-city Cooperation, University of Leeds, 2022)

The TBA has a radius of 20 kilometres (Halaburda, 2006). Ciudad del Este is strategically located, situated on the Pan American Highway, which runs from Paraguay to Brazil. Moreover, the Ponte da Amizade (Friendship Bridge) that links Ciudad del Este in Paraguay, and Foz do Iguaçu in Brazil, is one of the busiest bridges in South America (see Figure 5.2). Before the Covid-19 pandemic, it was estimated that over 30,000 vehicles and more than 80,000 people crossed it daily (O Globo, 2017). Puerto Iguazú, in Argentina, also has access to Brazil's Foz do Iguaçu across the river Iguazú at the Tancredo Neves International Bridge (Hudson, 2003).

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Figure 5.2: Detailed map of the Tri-Border Area (adapted from Devia-Garzon & Ortega-Avellaneda, 2019)

The TBA allows a vast flow of people and goods through the different land and river connections between the border cities. Ciudad del Este, the Paraguayan border city, is connected to Foz do Iguaçu in Brazil, through the Friendship Bridge, and the latter is linked to Puerto Iguazú, the Argentine city, by the Tancredo Neves Bridge, thus creating opportunities for a low-cost and easy-to-run network route where the crime-terror nexus can flourish (See Figure 5.3; Devia-Garzon & Ortega-Avellaneda, 2019).

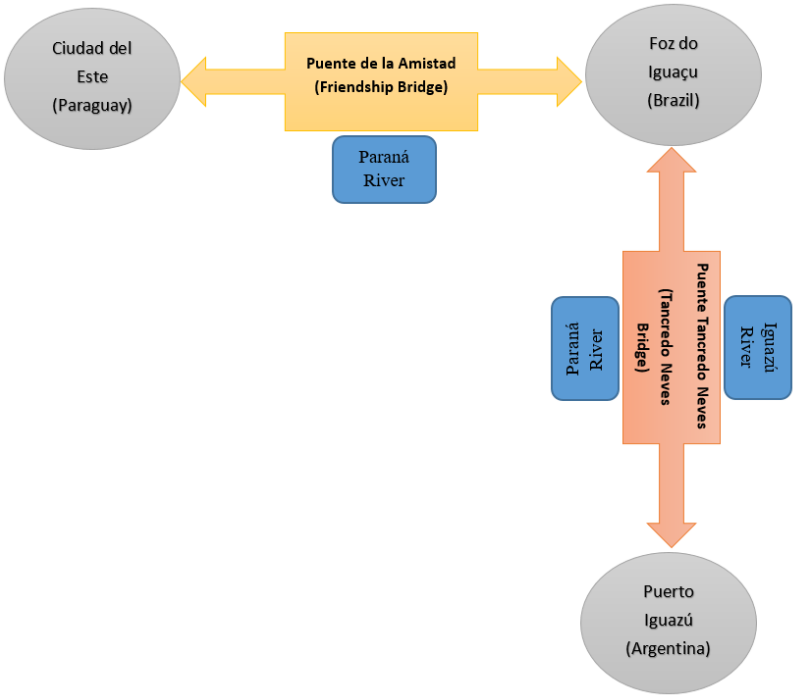

Figure 5.3: Intersection bridges in the Tri-Border Area (author's own representation)

The TBA provides a suitable environment in which terrorist organisations and organised criminal groups can thrive: it provides access to drugs, illegal weapons, various sources of financing and possibilities for money laundering, and also provides freedom of movement in a large geographic area (Wood, 2005; Amaral, 2010; Folch, 2012; Ferreira, 2016). Olmedo and Zabala (2008) argue that the porosity of the borders, coupled with the lack of coordination in the execution of prevention and control measures against crime, and decentralisation of information on security matters, are some causes that facilitate this crime-terror nexus in the TBA. For example, the unregulated economic area of Ciudad del Este and the thriving illegal activities have been described as sources for money laundering and fundraising in support of terrorist organisations. According to a Library of Congress research report, Ciudad del Este was generating "$12 to $13 billion in cash transactions annually, making it the third city worldwide behind Hong Kong and Miami" (Hudson, 2003).

This border zone surrounded by rivers and jungles is difficult to access by law enforcement agencies, and these conditions are exploited by criminal and terrorist groups, who settle in territories that are poorly regulated and supervised. Moreover, the TBA provides a haven that is socially, economically, and politically highly conducive to allowing organised crime and corrupt officials to operate in a symbiotic relationship that thrives on lucrative criminal activities (Goldberg, 2002; Bernal, 2019). The fluidity of the TBA, where thousands of people and products cross over the two bridges between Foz do Iguaçu and Ciudad del Este, and between Foz do Iguaçu and Puerto Iguazú daily, is a security concern for the three countries and so far, the responses have been ineffective (Devia-Garzon & Ortega-Avellaneda, 2019). With lenient border controls and more than 100 hidden airstrips in the region, the TBA has long been used by organised criminals, including contraband smugglers, arms traffickers, and drug traffickers. It is estimated that a large number of aeroplanes take off from hidden airstrips in Paraguay and enter Brazilian air space, while many criminals cross Argentina's Misiones Province, especially through the city of Posadas, where illegal products are easily smuggled across borders (Insight Crime, 2021; See Figure 5.4). The area is considered to be a channel for the smuggling of drugs through Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay, particularly Andean cocaine (Hudson, 2003).

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Figure 5.4: Misiones Province (InsightCrime, 2021)

In these spaces, terror and criminal groups draw support from the local populations while also using them to conduct illicit fund-raising activities (Levitt, 2016). The Tri-Border Area has one of the largest Arab communities in South America. Due to successive waves of migration in the 19th century, more than 90 per cent of the population in the TBA today is of Lebanese origin (Montaruli, 2020). Thus, links have been acknowledged between the Arab Muslim communities and terrorist groups. As emphasised in Chapter 3, organised criminal groups and terrorist organisations build strong social relations with the communities and achieve their support and recognition. This local connection provides a haven for terrorists and criminals alike, facilitating their cooperation: Lebanese citizens with links to criminal organisations act as facilitators for illegal partnerships with organised criminal groups, particularly in a fluid environment such as the TBA (Levitt, 2016).

5.4 Law Enforcement Operations in the Tri-Border Area

An investigator with the FBI opined that “The tri-border area is probably the most lucrative area for Hezbollah outside of the state sponsors” (Regan & Fisher, 2010). Despite the deep-rooted nature of criminality in parts of the TBA, state authorities have developed cooperative and national efforts to counter the crime-terror nexus, these efforts are challenged by criminal organisations deeply rooted in the area. However, over time, the responses to the crime-terror nexus have been uneven. In 2002, the TBA governments joined the “3+1 Group on Tri-Border Area Security” along with the US, intending to strengthen security in the region (Nielsen, 2019). In 2004, the US State Department invested $2.5 million in various programmes to counter terrorist activities in the TBA, such as training programs for the area’s institutions (Wood, 2005). Brazil also invested in its police infrastructure in Foz do Iguaçu, purchasing cameras and radar systems to monitor the known points of entry used for smuggling and drug trafficking in the area (Wood, 2005). However, illicit activities continued to thrive. For example, in the same year, Argentinian authorities investigated the alleged import of three surface-to-air missiles through northern Argentina into the TBA (Wood, 2005).

In 2008, the US Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) launched Project Cassandra, a campaign designed to expose a money laundering scheme in which profits obtained from Latin American drug-running were being funnelled to Hezbollah. For eight years, the project collected evidence regarding Hezbollah's criminal activities. They used wiretaps, undercover operations, and informants to map Hezbollah’s illicit networks with the help of some thirty different US and foreign security agencies (Meyer, 2017). DEA agents traced the activities to the inner circles of Hezbollah and its state sponsor, Iran (US Congress, 2017; DEA, 2016). Project Cassandra emphasised “the dangerous global nexus between drug trafficking and terrorism” (AlArabya News, 2017). Nonetheless, in December 2017 the publication of an article in the newspaper *Politico* pointed out that American President Barak Obama’s need for a negotiated settlement to Iran’s nuclear program resulted in a reluctance to pursue an effective agenda against the top Hezbollah operatives, blocking off the efforts of the Department of Justice (Meyer, 2017). According to the newspaper, during the Joint Comprehensive

Plan of Action (JCPOA), Iran requested that the Obama administration let Hezbollah off the hook, and it complied (Meyer, 2017; The Hill, 2017; Wall Street Journal, 2017). This clearly emphasises a point discussed earlier in the literature review, that the state-sponsor can protect its agent from the counter initiatives designed by the international community. After the conclusion of the Iranian nuclear deal, the Obama administration shut down Project Cassandra, losing eight years of investigation and what was regarded as an "unprecedented insight into these global networks" (US Congress, 2017).

In 2016, INTERPOL coordinated an eight-day joint operation in the area with Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay. Over 300 officers were deployed to key locations and they carried out 25 000 checks on Interpol's global databases, which resulted in the arrest of 25 criminals (INTERPOL, 2016). The authorities seized 750 kilos of drugs, including marijuana and cocaine and recovered 14 stolen vehicles (INTERPOL, 2016). In recent years, the TBA countries joined efforts to tackle this crime-terror nexus. As pointed out by José de Gracia, Assistant Director of INTERPOL's Criminal Networks Unit:

> The Tri-Border area and the challenges it faces are at the core of INTERPOL's mission. As criminals exploit the interconnected economies of Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay, only greater coordination between the three countries' police forces will bring about a step change in the region's fight against organized crime (Interpol, 2019).

For example, Paraguay and Argentina began targeting specific individuals known to work as financial backers for Hezbollah in the TBA (La Nacion, 2018). In the case of Ahmad Barakat, with the help of Brazil, Paraguay was able to extradite Barakat to the US (La Nacion, 2018). Paraguay's National Police is sharing intelligence with Argentina, Brazil, the US and several countries in the Middle East in an effort to tackle Hezbollah's activities in the region (Villamayor, 2018). The government of Argentina established a counter-narcotics task force in Salta Province composed of the four Argentine federal law enforcement agencies and provincial forces (StopIllegal, 2019). Subsequently, the Ministry of Security decided to create a second task force focused

on the north-eastern provinces to cover the TBA (StopIllegal, 2019). In November 2019, an INTERPOL-coordinated operation included more than 600 police officers from Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay mobilised in the TBA. Codenamed Operation Triple Border, the initiative culminated in the arrest of 24 individuals, with drugs, vehicles, firearms and other illicit products being seized during the operation. This has helped establish a reinforced INTERPOL presence in the Tri-Border Area.

5.6 Summary

This chapter provides a brief overview of the context of the TBA, where the crime-terror nexus evolved over the years. Not only does it describe the geographical area, but it also presents some of the previous initiatives developed in order to counter Hezbollah's operations in the TBA are also presented in order to collaborate the information presented in section 3.5.2. However, it is worth noting that the efforts to counter the crime-terror nexus are constantly changing.

By providing an overview of the context in which Hezbollah operates in the TBA, this chapter sets the scene for this research and builds up the foundation for the examination of the crime-terror nexus in the region. This section provides the information necessary to allow the reader to understand the background of the problem and the context in which the phenomenon occurs. The following chapters shed light on the particularities of the TBA that facilitate the formation of the crime-terror nexus and the factors that influence Hezbollah's decision to engage in organised criminal activities. The next chapter presents the data collected during primary research and offers a summary and analysis of the data in an organised manner that relates to the research questions of this study. Drawing comprehensively on entries from primary data, the following chapter highlights key emergent themes extrapolated from the data and sheds light on furthering the understanding and knowledge of the crime-terror nexus concerning Hezbollah in the TBA.

Chapter 6: Data analysis/Findings

6.1 Introduction

This chapter contains a detailed presentation and discussion of the data, its analysis and the findings of this study. The data analysed for this research consists of 25 interviews with researchers and professionals that know about Hezbollah's activities in the Tri-Border Area (TBA). To identify the themes and achieve the research objectives of this thesis, the researcher used the research questions to guide the qualitative data analysis. This qualitative study addresses the following four research questions as follows:

RQ 1: What factors appear to prompt the formation of the crime-terror nexus in the TBA?

RQ 2: What are the potential drivers of criminality behind Hezbollah's involvement in organised crime in the TBA?

RQ 3: What organised criminal activities does Hezbollah engage in, in the TBA?

RQ 4: What are the key informants' perceptions of the initiatives designed to tackle the crime-terror nexus in the TBA?

Therefore, the data analysis was divided into four sections based on the themes identified (See Figure 6.1).

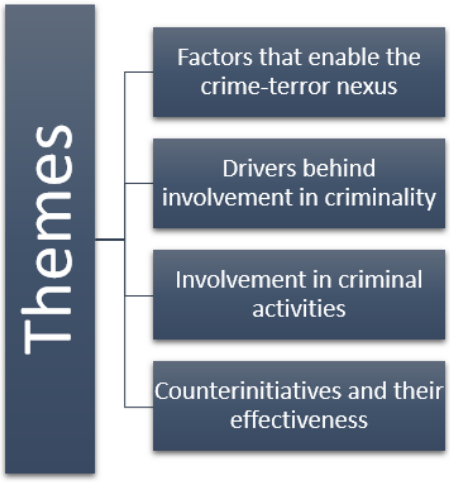

Figure 6.1: Representation of themes (Author's own)

The first area of analysis considers the formation of the crime-terror nexus in the TBA, with a particular focus on the factors that enable its development. This section details how various characteristics of the area have been conducive to Hezbollah's engagement in the crime-terror nexus and hence explains the presence of terrorist and organised groups in the area.

The second analytical focus is placed on the motivations behind the formation of the crime-terror nexus in the TBA to explain why a state-sponsored terrorist group decides to engage in a crime-terror nexus. Through data analysis, the researcher divided Hezbollah's drivers into two categories, based on necessity and opportunity. The lack of state sponsorship, as well as the opportunities provided by the TBA, are analysed further in this chapter.

The third analytical perspective focuses on Hezbollah's involvement in organised criminal activities and their linkages with organised criminal groups in the TBA in an attempt to offer an overall picture of the crime-terror nexus in the region.

Finally, the analysis pays specific attention to the research participants' perceptions of the initiatives designed to tackle the crime-terror nexus in the TBA and whether these have been so far efficient, introducing factors that have facilitated or impeded the effectiveness of these strategies in the TBA.

6.2 Factors that enable the crime-terror nexus in the Tri-Border Area

Interview participants describe the TBA as having characteristics of what has been termed in the literature as the black hole (Makarenko, 2004). As mentioned in Chapter 3, Section 4.3, the "black hole syndrome" describes an environment that is the perfect breeding ground for many forms of the crime-terror nexus (Makarenko, 2004). Generally associated with a geographically defined area where the provision of security is scarce and the application of the rule of law is almost inexistent, the "black hole syndrome" represents a vacuum being created by the inability of the government to exercise control over an area and thereby drawing in terrorist organisations and criminal groups alike. The review of interview responses shows that the TBA can be considered a "black hole" area, where effective state control is jeopardised. Participant 13, a Lebanese academic, points out that "This area is known to be somewhat outlawed, meaning that no government has full control", while Participant 14, a US academic, also emphasises that "the area, it's pretty remote. Like it's, I would say, metaphorically speaking, it could be its own state independent region, because of limited resources local authorities have in there."

There is a consensus from several interview participants that the TBA can be considered a "black hole" where the absent or ineffective exercise of state governance, porous borders, ungoverned spaces, lawlessness and easy access to arms and illicit trade converge to create comparative advantages for the emergence of the crime-terror nexus. Participant 4, a UK academic, highlights that the area's fragility offers the

perfect conditions for developing the crime-terror nexus: “I think the background conditions that are there, especially the Tri-Border Area of, you know, extreme state fragility. And obviously, just the sort of geostrategic aspects of organised crime, like, you know, the need to be where the resources are, and where the resources can be transported.”

However, the fragility of the area is not directly caused by the disappearance of government structures or their inability to enforce the rule of law, but is rather due to the prospects the area offers to non-state actors. The fragile area is solely the context that enables these elements to thrive. Participant 15, a Brazilian Federal Agent, points out that “The Tri Border area is an interesting place. […] Why? Because it’s what we call ‘The United Nations of Crime’”. In concurrence, participant 7 highlights the importance of the TBA as a hub for various criminal activities, characterised by a flow of illegal activities, money, and lack of control. He emphasises that “You have this loose area, a lot of money, a lot of drugs circulating, not a lot of control. So they just enjoy, it's sort of a nice equation. You have the guys, you have the language, you have the structure, you have the money, so you can just enjoy and do this.”

From interviews, it can be observed that the area possesses a series of characteristics that facilitate the formation of the crime-terror nexus. These are related to the particular features of the area that constitutes a black hole: its geographical, social and ethnic composition, its criminal shadow economy, and its comparative advantages, all of which are discussed in this chapter. Linking to the first research question of this thesis, this section now goes on to detail how four specific characteristics of the TBA have been favourable to the formation of the crime-terror nexus and which explain the presence of these groups in the area (See Figure 6.2). The following findings have been observed:

- the geographical environment surrounding the Tri-Border cities;
- the local Arab ethnic community in the TBA;
- the prevalence of corruption;
- political disagreements.

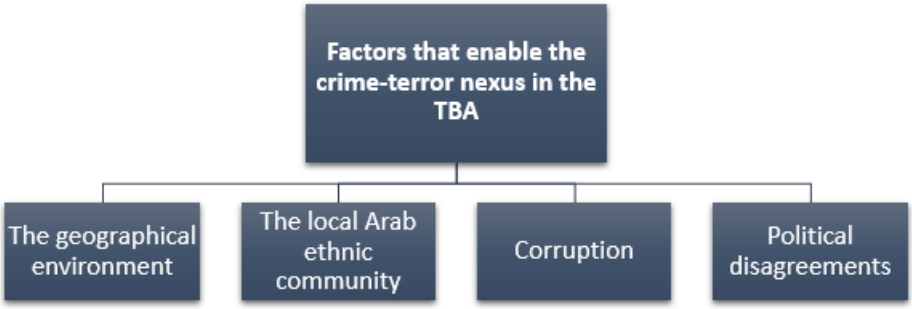

Figure 6.2: Factors that enable the crime-terror nexus (Author's own representation)

6.2.1 Geographical attributes that facilitate the crime-terror nexus

As noted in Chapter 5, which established the context of this research, the TBA is a notoriously lawless region. Geographically, the area is situated where the ground, air, and water routes converge. Bounded by the rivers of Parana and Iguazu, the TBA is a jungle area that connects the national boundaries of the three countries (Agulló, 2020). The area represents a pivotal domain for conducting illicit activities, given that the two rivers that mark the borders between the three states offer many unsurveilled entry points. Participant 15, a Brazilian Federal Police Agent, emphasises that "The borders are very porous. We have land borders, and also we have borders with a river. So they can cross the river by boat. There is a jungle. So they have all the ingredients that make a place difficult to be, you know, patrolled and overseen".

The jungle surrounding the TBA conceals terrorist and criminal activities from the law enforcement agencies operating in the area. For example, research shows that the TBA was instrumental in the preparation of the terrorist attacks in Argentina (1992 and 1994), as the area provided the means to prepare for the attacks undetected, and the operation could be conducted from the terrorist strongholds in the area (Hudson, 2003; Levitt, 2006; 2015). Participant 1, part of the Argentine Financial Intelligence Unit, highlights the importance of geographical characteristics that

facilitate the formation of the crime-terror nexus and emphasises that "[it is] Geography that facilitates [Hezbollah's] operations. Geography in that area explains almost everything. You've got three big cities: Foz do Iguaçu, Puerto Iguazú, and Ciudad del Este. And then if you go there, there's nothing, I mean, literally, you just get out of the radio, of the sea, and you're in the middle of the jungle. So it is easy for them to operate from there."

Therefore, one crucial point emphasised by participants is that the jungle surrounding the tri-border towns allows illegal activities to happen at ease, enabling the formation of the crime-terror nexus. The complex geography of this area forms an impediment to effective state control. Participant 23, an Argentine academic, says, "This Tri-Border Area, geographically, is already complicated. You have rivers, you have jungles, it's very close to the jungle so it's very easy to escape". Thus, the remote and unguarded nature of the jungles and rivers is also particularly attractive, as it allows for freedom of movement in a geographic area ideal for camouflage and concealment.

Participant 3, an Argentine International Relations professional, points out that "The environment, it's like when you decide to start a garden, and you have specific plants you want to grow, the basic you need is a proper environment. So geographically speaking, is sort of paradise". Similarly, Participant 18, an anti-fraud and anti-money laundering specialist from Brazil points out, "I believe [the Tri-Border Area] is a paradise for the wrong people with wrong ideas".

The findings indicate that borders between Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay are loose and poorly patrolled and monitored. Participant 5, a Policy Analyst at RAND Corporation[1], emphasises that "All of these areas that are super ambiguous, that don't really have a state presence and that are very hard to police, or even to sort of signal who the state presence is there". This suggests that terrorists and criminals alike can go undetected due to the very isolated terrain and the inability of the law enforcement agencies to effectively guard the borders. A similar view is shared by Participant 2, a US researcher, who underlines that the area "it's out in the middle of nowhere, it's very

[1] An American nonprofit global policy think tank.

difficult for the government forces to actually do something." Not only do participants describe the Tri-Border Area as a "paradise" due to its geographical characteristics, but they also bring forth issues that affect the ability of law enforcement to tackle the convergence of terrorism and organised crime in this territory. The existence of the two bridges, the Tancredo Neves bridge (Brazil-Argentina) and the Friendship Bridge (Brazil-Paraguay), is another facilitator of illegal enterprises that benefit the crime-terror nexus in the region, emphasised in the interviews. Research shows that between 30 to 40, 000 people travel daily by the Friendship Bridge, connecting Ciudad del Este and Foz do Iguaçu, facilitating the circulation of goods, including illegal trade (Kosmynka, 2020). In 2001, an estimated 30,000 people crossed both bridges daily. In 2017, this number jumped to over 100,000 people and over 40,000 vehicles per day (Agulló, 2020). Participant 11, a political scientist based in the US, highlights the problems of regulating and controlling these bridges effectively, by stating that:

> A large part of the problem also is that the flow of daily cross border traffic for commercial reasons, is unstoppable at the frontier. The Friendship Bridge alone manages over 100,000 crossings a day on foot. So you have the cloud, even if everything else was transparent, honest, and so on; you have the classic dilemma of modern logistics, which is: if you do control everybody, you shut down the economy. You disrupt it, you know, in a very costly way. I mean, think about ports like Long Beach in California or Miami, Florida, or Newark, in New Jersey, or Rotterdam in the Netherlands - these are ports that handle thousands of containers every day. And a lot of the interdiction is done by analytical tools. It's not done by inspection. So, you know, the less you have to invest in these types of controls, the less you're willing to stop and search, the easier it gets.

In this case, criminal actors seek to become involved in cross–border activity for material gains and strategic purposes, in an "opportunistic use of borders" (Rumford, 2014). Interview data suggests that law enforcement cannot identify possible illegalities without real-time intelligence and weak cross-border controls. The existence of the two bridges, coupled with lose control of the borders, provides an

invitational edge for the crime-terror nexus to flourish in an environment that is poorly controlled by law enforcement agencies. Participant 5, a Policy Analyst, emphasises that criminal activities are a profitable venture in the TBA where the borders are contested, efforts are poorly coordinated, and jurisdiction issues come into play by pointing out that:

> […] you would see lack of security, very loose understanding of whose jurisdiction came into play there. So, low state capacity, obviously created a lot of incentives for all of these activities. So the Tri-Border Area being a tri-border, it becomes a much more volatile place, a place where security efforts are not really very well coordinated. On top of it, it's not like the sort of region where there's a lot of state capacity, so then you would have like, obviously, an available population that is willing to exploit some of those governance gaps that exist.

Participant 9, an international security specialist previously responsible for Argentina's counter-narcotics operations, concurs that the TBA offers the perfect environment, stating that "It's the perfect combo, the perfect environment for an illegal or illicit activity to develop over there". It is worth noting that apart from the sea and land, trafficking by air plays an important role in transporting illegal commodities. Thus, to facilitate the process of trafficking by air in Paraguay and Argentina, illegal airports were built, such as those in the province of Misiones, covered previously in the Chapter Five (Context Chapter) (Kosmynka, 2020).

Participant 22, a Special Agent with the Brazilian Federal Police, suggests that "Paraguay is the eye of the triple border […] it is in the middle of the countries that produce cocaine". Moreover, the easy access to three international airports offers international connectivity, which allows criminals and terrorists alike to expand their networks (Participant 9, an International Security Specialist). The importance of the area and the airports in the region is also emphasised by Participant 23, an Argentine academic, who points out that "Geographically, I think it constitutes a fantastic area! Because you have different airports very close. You have the one from Formosa

Province, and you also have the one from Asuncion in Paraguay. And then you have in Misiones, Posadas. So it's very easy just to fade away".

Moreover, Ciudad del Este is a crucial commercial node in South America. The whole region is a transnational area a little larger than New York City with two national parks and three international airports (Agulló, 2020). Participant 3, an Argentine International Relations professional, shares the same opinion but also brings into attention the illegal economy that characterises the region, pointing out that "Ciudad del Este, it's sort of Marrakesh - it's far more cash than any Latin American city. It's a huge open market. Not in the way it is in Morocco, but you know, with buildings and stuff and everything is going on there. Well, I'd say 90% of everything going on there is illegal".

Data analysis shows that monitoring these trajectories has been highly ineffective over the years. The porosity of the frontier, where thousands of people cross over the two bridges connecting the tri-border cities daily is a security concern for the three countries, as they are difficult to regulate. Therefore, crimes such as drug and arms trafficking, smuggling, and other illicit activities are extremely common. This is summarised best by Participant 7, a Brazilian academic, who points out that "What they are doing right now is you have this loose area, a lot of money, a lot of drugs circulating, not a lot of control. So they just enjoy it, it's sort of a nice equation." This is an important argument, shared by other participants who also felt that "You had the infrastructure, you had sort of the benefits of an area that was strategic, but also remote, in a sense. So you wouldn't have, you know, it wouldn't be the centre of attention" (Participant 11, a US Political Scientist). Although geographic factors do not create lawless areas in and of themselves, criminal and terrorist groups take advantage of regions that are difficult to access and somewhat isolated from the rest of the state, often surrounded by jungle vegetation, and where it is difficult to enforce laws due to the inability to cross international borders and jurisdictions. Interviews suggest that the TBA possesses all these characteristics, and it was also emphasised that the environment "is ideal because you don't have proper law enforcement operating in the area because being a triple border, it needs three different law enforcement to coordinate to tackle one thing, so it's more demanding. And it's more

liquid. It's like, it's very weak." (Participant 3, an Argentine International Relations professional). The geographical attributes that permit the crime-terror nexus to develop in the TBA are unrestricted access to ungoverned spaces, unsupervised jungles and maritime routes, and unregulated borders. These factors lead to the characterisation of the TBA as a black hole area, which facilitates the formation of the crime-terror nexus.

6.2.2 The Arab community – The 'local connection' in the Tri-Border Area

The proliferation of poorly governed spaces in the TBA has allowed Hezbollah to exploit local populations and resources to support their operations and facilitated the formation of the crime-terror nexus in the region. The key element that emerged from interviews is that the large Lebanese diaspora in TBA has made the area a rich source of financial and logistical support for Hezbollah. This supports the literature findings in Chapter Three, which emphasise that terrorist organisations build solid social relations with the communities and achieve their support. The local connection in the TBA emerged as a theme of the interviews from aross a variety of areas. Interestingly, Participant 15, a Brazilian academic, felt that "We have more Lebanese in Brazil than in Lebanon". Many interviewees focused on the importance of the Lebanese diaspora as a crucial element for the formation of the crime-terror nexus. Participant 12, a retired Argentine Police Officer, argues that "The large Arab community in the area that allows them to operate with total impunity", which suggests that the social framework of the Arab community allows terrorist organisations to operate with little chance of detection (Meehan, 2004). A similar view is shared by Participant 8, a Brazilian scholar from São Paulo, who suggests that "What we know is that the local Shia community, mostly Lebanese immigrants and descendants, supports Hezbollah's actions in the Middle East".

Loyal Hezbollah operatives and supporters have created situations within which they can facilitate criminal activities and leverage the support of the larger community in the TBA to fund Hezbollah (Realuyo, 2014; Levitt 2016). The key element that emerged from the interviews is that this local connection provides a haven for terrorists and criminals alike, which facilitates their cooperation as Lebanese citizens with links

to criminal organisations act as facilitators for criminal partnerships with organised criminal groups (Levitt, 2016). Participant 5, a Policy Analyst, points out that:

> Hezbollah [is] having there a Lebanese community, which was extensively pretty favourable to Hezbollah's interests [..]some sort of a connection to either populations that are local there. And that also like it gives them some sort of a motivation or a protection to carry out operations in areas that have significant governance gaps.

On a similar note, Participant 11, a Political Scientist based in the US who has extensive knowledge of Hezbollah, points out that "[You have] these incredibly well-oiled and developed money laundering infrastructure, at the centre of which are members of the Shia Lebanese community, many of whom are supporters of Hezbollah". For example, the Barakat network, which was discussed, previously in the Context Chapter, created space for others to support Hezbollah more passively and this has been emphasised in some interviews. For example, under Barakat's supervision the Galeria Page in Ciudad del Este served as both a source of fundraising for Hezbollah, and as a base of operations in the TBA (See Chapter Five). Participant 15, a Special Agent with the Brazilian Federal Police, points out that:

> 20 years ago, when Barakat was first arrested in Brazil, when the police raided his house […] they found a letter of appreciation that came from Hassan Nasrallah himself, right? And later Barakat said 'Look, what I do is what the 2000 Lebanese in Tri-Border Area do: we send money to Hezbollah, because it's our party'. So he just made public what we, intelligence-wise, we knew, right?! So this is what happens nowadays, they do send money, I'm sure about it. And some of that money comes from legal enterprises, and people not affiliated with Hezbollah, but people that are supervisors in the group, and some comes from criminal enterprises like Barakat, and others.

Linking this to the literature, there is no doubt as to Assad Barakat's position, being described as "a key terrorist financier in South America who has used every financial crime in the book, including his businesses, to generate funding for

Hezbollah…. From counterfeiting to extortion, this Hezbollah sympathizer committed financial crimes and utilized front companies to underwrite terror" (Levitt, 2016). This had also been emphasised in the interviews, that "there are a lot of community members who assist Hezbollah with trade-based money laundering, designed to launder revenues from criminal endeavours" (Participant 6, Argentine Analyst).

It could be argued that based on participants' responses, the Arab community is regarded as a "suspect community" (Hillyard, 1993). Pantazis and Pemberton (2009, p.649) define the suspect community as "a sub-group of the population that is singled out for state attention as being 'problematic'. Specifically in terms of policing, individuals may be targeted, not necessarily as a result of suspected wrong doing, but simply because of their presumed membership to that sub-group […]". The larger part of the population in the TBA is Arab and it became one of the "closely watched Arab population centres in South America", particularly after the 9/11 attacks, because of the focus on community's possible ties to terrorist activities (Hudson, 2003, p.1). When considering the 1992 and 1994 terrorist attacks associated with Hezbollah in Buenos Aires previously discussed in section 3.5.1, this may have contributed to the social construction and reinforcement of the Arab community as 'suspect' of having the same ideological viewpoints, which, in turn, may result in a law enforcement bias towards members of the community. Moreover, the significant cases discussed in section 5.3 can also be a catalyst in the formation of prejudice and discrimination towards the Arab community in the TBA due to Arabs being seen as a group which poses an apparent threat to society by engaging in a wide range of criminal activities (Hillyard, 1993).

Hence, some participants in this study may have made discretionary judgements based on these considerations, which include the conditioned belief that the Arab community in the TBA facilitates in the crime-terror nexus. However, it has been emphasised by other participants that not all Arabs are involved in these operations, which reduces the potential bias from the law enforcement community and offers an all-encompassing perspective on the local connection. Several participants shared different opinions about the diaspora community and their involvement with Hezbollah. During his interview, Participant 7, a Brazilian researcher, had conflicting views, pointing out that "most of the people I've been interviewing, or from the security

channels in Brazil, I'm still debating how close and connected they are with Hezbollah itself. If there is someone doing this sort of general organisation or they're basically loose connections." Other interviews reveal that although certain criminal activities are identified, the law enforcement agencies cannot specifically attribute these activities to Hezbollah:

> "So the local officials and you know, they would readily acknowledge that there was money laundering, illicit finance, contraband, trafficking, but they said 'Well, you know, how do I know that these Lebanese are Hezbollah? Just because they're Lebanese, they don't, it doesn't mean that it's Hezbollah'." (Participant 11, a Political Scientist based in the US)

Therefore, it can be argued that in some cases, although Hezbollah has some loose connections with the Arab community in the TBA, this label cannot be applied to the entire community and governments in the TBA, particularly Brazil, are reluctant to apply such labels, as suggested by Participant 7. Drawing on his academic experience, he points out that " […] you can just keep pushing and create this sort of narrative structure that it's quite easy to basically describe every single Lebanese actor, or a Syrian Lebanese now in Brazil, as a terrorist. So I think Brazil is quite reluctant to create this macro structure".

Participants also emphasised that because Brazil does not have a clear designation of Hezbollah as a terrorist organisation, those who have links with Hezbollah are only considered sympathisers or facilitators:

> I mean, Lebanese criminals, some of them, we could see them in terrorists suspect lists. But we cannot actually frame them 'Hezbollah'. We saw them in terror lists as Hezbollah facilitators, or sympathisers, or members. But as I told you, we do not have Hezbollah as a terror group in Brazil, we target the crime, and not the persons involved (Participant 15, a Special Agent with the Brazilian Federal Police).

Moreover, Lebanese citizens in the TBA argue that it would be impossible for terrorists to hide in their midst and deny remittances sent abroad go to Hezbollah

(Abbott, 2004). Thus, it seems unfair to assume that the entire diaspora community in the area has links with Hezbollah and label them as such. Participant 9, an Argentine International Relations professional previously responsible for the introduction of a new drug supply reduction strategy, supports this argument and points out that:

> This is not to say that the Shia are all involved in these operations in the Tri Border area, but Hezbollah takes advantage of the cultural links, and, in some aspects, some religious things also, to have a foot there and to develop in this, you know, absolutely, like, uncontrolled environment over there to develop its activities.

Local Arabs state that, contrary to common accusations, they do not constitute a passive community amongst which terrorists can easily hide and operate (Ferreira, 2012). Nonetheless, the consensus among the participants is that "the support of the local community helped them to grow slowly, but surely" (Participant 20, an Israeli academic). The TBA remains one of the "regional nodes for money laundering and is vulnerable to terrorist financing", as mentioned in the 2019 County Reports on Terrorism (United States, 2019, p. 175). Findings revealed that the TBA provides a geographical haven for Hezbollah, and it is very important for the formation of the crime-terror nexus: "The importance of the Tri-Border Area to Hezbollah grows out of these considerations that you had a community, you had the infrastructure, you had sort of the benefits of an area that was strategic, but also remote, in a sense" (Participant 11, a Political Scientist based in the US).

6.2.3 Corruption and Impunity – an interplay that intensifies the crime-terror nexus in the Tri-Border Area

Corruption in Latin America "coats almost every level of bureaucracy, from the highest authorities, who require large sums of money to manipulate the political-administrative machine, to the small fry: customs officers, border police, and provincial and municipal officials" (Arias, 2006, p.17). Many interviewees focused on corruption as a facilitating factor in the formation of the crime-terror nexus. One interviewee states that "Each and every country in the Tri-Border Area suffer from inside widespread corruption at all levels of government and police" (Participant 20, Israeli Academic).

Moreover, the interview data shows that there is a mutual agreement among the participants that corruption is an endemic and growing problem in all three states. A Political Scientist based in the US suggests that “Corruption is […] on the Brazilian side and probably also on the Argentinian side, […] it’s endemic. In Paraguay, it is systemic, so the Paraguayan state it’s by large bought to allow crime to thrive or rather a large part of its economy is illicit” (Participant 11). He goes on to point out that “The former president of Paraguay was the principal cigarette smuggler in Latin America. And he’s wanted in Brazil now for money laundering. But you know, he’s still running, pulling the strings behind the scenes inspired by politics.” This also emphasises the role of Paraguay, a state in which corruption thrives and infiltrates all levels of society, facilitating the crime-terror nexus despite the initiatives developed by the neighbour states to tackle this.

The key element that emerges from the interviews is a threefold nexus between corruption, organised criminal groups and terrorists in the TBA:

> You have all the ingredients for a large number of corruptions. If you get a lot of money flowing, you have illegal trade, you have illegal drugs, you have those guys everyday getting asked by narco traffickers to have a loose eye, to look to the other side when they’re coming. So corruption is a big deal (Participant 7, a Brazilian academic).

Most of the illegal actions in the TBA bear the hallmark of corruption as the area is characterised by Shelley (2014) as a ‘dirty entanglement’ of weak security institutions, accustomed corrupt practices, impunity and illicit economies – particularly due to the widespread levels of corruption of police, border guards and customs officials. Participant 22, a Special Agent with the Brazilian Federal Police, illustrates this best when portraying some incidents that happened in Brazil:

> I have a couple of colleagues that were in a fight with the military force in Paraguay, because they support the drug dealers, they support weapon trafficking there. And by that, I mean that you can see the river boats loaded with drugs, weapons or whatever, cigars, crossing the

> border to Brazil, and escorted by a unit from military units. And they shoot at the Brazilian officers, I mean, like a war.

Yet again, the emphasis is placed on Paraguay as the weaker state in the TBA, where high levels of corruption and collusion between law enforcement and criminals diminish most efforts to counter the crime-terror nexus.

There is a general agreement that the TBA is an area where bribes are accepted, documents can be easily forged, drugs and weapons can be smuggled, and free passage can be acquired if adequate remuneration is paid. Participant 23, an Argentine academic, concurs that some law enforcement officers "They're very corrupt, and some things they control, in terms of customs, and some others, they just received bribes, they just look the other way." Also, with the help of the 'local connection' generated by the Middle East community, the crime-terror nexus can flourish and develop extensively: "You usually see a Lebanese guy […], they are really good with those connections. They know how to take the drugs from Paraguay, the weapons, and bring them to Brazil. They know the ones you should corrupt, the ones you should pay the bribe." (Participant 7, a Brazilian academic).

Criminals and terrorists can operate with impunity after having corrupted the law enforcement apparatus. The TBA provides plenty of opportunities for profit, but it also opens avenues for corruption. The interplay between corrupt officials and criminal impunity has been highlighted by a US Researcher, who pointed out that "It's a lot of money and sometimes, I think that in some situations, that got local governments to turn a blind eye. Maybe local governments are making a little extra money off the side" (Participant 2). In this way, corruption is not only a facilitator for both kinds of illicit actors but provides an enabling environment. By purchasing the cooperation and the 'blind eye' of law enforcement officials such as police officers or border guards, they can achieve their operational goals, operate with impunity and escape justice. The consensus among the participants is that the level of corruption is high and that law enforcement officers are turning a blind eye to the illegalities that occur in the region: "Just don't talk about it, just look the other way because you don't have the power. So you can get what you earn in a year perhaps in one week, if you just look the other

way around and let them cross the river with drugs and weapons" (Participant 23, an Argentine academic). This is also supported by Participant 2, a US researcher, who emphasises that "Money talks and bull***t walks". Hence, the combination of poverty, poor governance, weak institutions, corruption, and lack of accountability makes the TBA a "black hole" region where a combination of characteristics allow the formation of the crime-terror nexus. Overall, it can be argued that corruption serves as an underlying condition for increased crime and terrorism. Once the governing bodies allow for the rule of law to be subverted by corruption and do not exercise control over all territories, criminals and terrorists take advantage of these 'cracks' in the system to establish themselves and consolidate their partnerships and illegal activities. Corruption, impunity, and the ineffective exercise of state governance in the TBA strengthen its characterisation of a "black hole" where the crime-terror nexus thrives.

6.2.4 Political disagreements facilitating the dynamics of the crime-terror nexus

A common subtheme that emerges from the interviews is that the three states adopt their idiosyncratic approaches to defining, ratifying, and applying proscription rules. Hence, the regional structure of proscribed terrorist organisations is characterised by tensions and inconsistencies. The interview responses show a shared perception that the cooperation between the three countries is highly politicised, specifically in terms of security issues. Participant 24, a Captain in the Brazilian Army opines that there is not sufficient collaboration between the three countries, and points out that:

> Latin American countries are in-group societies. We are politically very polarised and we don't act strategically. The countries in Latin America move according to the current political party in power. This fact influences the most the cooperation among the countries, mainly when it comes to strategic intelligence and security integration.

Under President Mauricio Macri, Argentina became the first Latin American nation to designate Hezbollah as a terrorist organisation and design policies to freeze its assets, although the designation came twenty-five years after the Buenos Aires

terrorist attacks. Therefore, some participants believe that Hezbollah's designation was achieved due to the political advantages this brings: "In terms of Argentina, it was clearly a political decision by Macri. And so while the new president - and his vice president was really the one who was running the show there - politically because of the need to maintain relations with the United States, they couldn't walk it back" (Participant 11, a US Political Scientist). This argument is also supported by literature, as it is argued that President Macri had centred his foreign policy around strengthening the ties with the US, claiming that terrorism and organised crime have joined forces (Brancoli, 2019).

Less than a month after Argentina became the first Latin American country to blacklist Hezbollah, Paraguay followed suit after authorities confirmed Hezbollah's ties with active criminal organisations in its shared border region with Brazil and Argentina. However, Paraguay's designation of Hezbollah as a terrorist organisation is met with scepticism by many interviewees. Participant 11, for example, opines that regardless of the designation, Paraguay does not pursue Hezbollah nor try to dismantle its network, but the opposite:

> The Argentinians I think, did it better than the Paraguayans because the Argentinians created a mechanism that allows them not just to say Hezbollah is a terrorist organisation, but they can do what OFAC[2] does […], they can designate new entities and individuals. Whereas Paraguay just has a presidential decree that says Hezbollah is a terrorist organisation, end of story. So they're not actually going after Hezbollah entities and proxies inside their own borders. My understanding is that before they passed the decree, the office of the presidency or probably the Vice President, who's really the deal maker with the Ciudad del Este community, went out there to reassure the Lebanese community that there would be no practical consequences to their activities.

[2] The Office of Foreign Assets Control is a financial intelligence and enforcement agency of the US Treasury Department which administers and enforces economic and trade sanctions.

Once more, Paraguay seems to be the weak link in the region. Although Paraguay's government passed new laws to improve its anti-money laundering and terror finance regulations, the gap between stated objectives and actual results remains visible. A similar perspective on this matter revealed that Paraguayan authorities had denied Hezbollah's presence in the country. Participant 19, a Research Analyst with InsightCrime[3], points out that "Paraguay denies having problems with Hezbollah. It assigns its presence abroad in Brazil and Argentina". A Policy Analyst also shares this view at RAND Corporation, pointing out the differences in approach between the three countries by saying that:

> Paraguay […] they had a completely different version from what Brazil and Argentina were saying. Brazil, Argentina were saying they need more, 'We need more capacity'. And Paraguay was at the same time saying: 'No, I think we've done a great job. I think it's going really great. And, you know, no need to do any more' (Participant 5).

The different attitudes of the TBA governments regarding Hezbollah highlight a lack of coordination and, implicitly, an ineffective approach to countering the crime-terror nexus in the region. Yet again, undermined by high levels of corruption and impunity, the Tri-Border Area governments cannot reach a consensus and develop a common proactive policy subject to rigorous scrutiny that deals with the crime-terror nexus in the region. Similar to what had been emphasised in Chapters 2 and 3 about the wider community not being able to reach an agreement about the terrorism and organised crime definitions, the incapacity of the Tri-Border governments to reach a consensus about Hezbollah and its affiliates in the region only raises issues in relation how the crime-terror nexus phenomenon is tackled in the area.

The interview data shows that there is a mutual feeling among the participants that political disagreements influence the way in which the TBA governments tackle the crime-terror nexus: "Each time, the government changes, it changes its position regarding the problem" (Participant 9, an Argentine International Relations

[3] InSight Crime is a non-profit journalism and investigative organisation specialised in organised crime in Latin America and the Caribbean.

professional, previously responsible for the introduction of a new drug supply reduction strategy). Participant 12, a retired Argentine Police Officer, suggests that "the constantly changing policy towards addressing conflict in the area, which by alternating between governments of one symbol and another, one prevents and undoes the efforts that the other has made." Similarly, it can be observed that political disagreements hinder governments' initiatives to tackle the crime-terror nexus jointly, and therefore little progress is achieved:

> In this moment, Argentina's president is from the opposite party, for example, of Brazil's president, so they hate each other. And they will never cooperate on such things, differently than previous government and government before. So when the two presidents connect, things happen, when they don't, they try to destroy what has been previously done by others to replace. So it's like a loop, never progresses (Participant 3, an Argentine International Relations professional).

When referring to Hezbollah's designation as a terrorist group, especially in Brazil, interviews show a common understanding that there is still much resistance against efforts to designate it as such. Participant 10, a Professor of Law in Rio de Janeiro, with extensive expertise in policing, points out that "Our terror law is very flawed and incomplete. It says it's a thorough law, but it does not define properly which organisations can be considered terror organisation or which acts, even individual acts, could be considered terror act or something like this". Once again, legislative approaches lack cohesion on a matter that affects all three countries. Nevertheless, in a television interview, the president's son, Eduardo Bolsonaro, pointed out that "They are criminals and terrorists […]. Hezbollah maintains a prominent presence on the border between Argentina, Paraguay and Brazil. Most of their activities revolve around money laundering and trade, rather than terrorism" (Parush, 2019). This brings up another issue emphasised by the interviewees, which is that unlike Argentina, Brazil has not been a victim of terrorist attacks and that the organisation focuses more on generating profits from the region. Therefore, Participant 10 continued his argument and underlined Brazil's reluctance to declare Hezbollah a terrorist organisation, accentuating his beliefs:

> I think that Brazil does not want to discuss so much, it's much more rhetorical, because in effect, Brazil was not a target. Brazil is not a target of terror organisations. And if the country presses for the law, a harsher law, or to declare some organisation as a terrorist organisation, to impose to the institutions tighter control of some activities, it would impose some more costs for the public securities divisions.

Brazil's President, Jair Bolsonaro, has not yet declared Hezbollah a terrorist organisation, although it was suggested that this would be done "soon" (Bilbassy-Charters, 2020). Participant 10, a Brazilian academic, finds this to be a curious fact and points out that "It's interesting, because since the beginning of Bolsonaro's administration, he has publicly affirmed that he would like to strengthen ties with Israel and the United States, especially United States, under Donald Trump […], but it's interesting because Brazil has not touched on this issue." Once more, a reluctance to approach the matter of terrorist designation and to accept the existence of the crime-terror nexus can be observed.

Although the participants agree that the overall classification as a terrorist organisation can have a curbing effect on Hezbollah's activities in the TBA, interestingly, some interviewees opine that designating Hezbollah a terrorist organisation would require more efforts to be made to counter its dealings, which the TBA countries do not possess at the moment. Some participants believe that directing the focus on Hezbollah would create more issues that perhaps the government is not ready to deal with yet. Interestingly, Participant 2, a US researcher, points out that "If it's not a terrorist organisation, you don't have to fight it actually, do you?". Participant 8, a Brazilian academic from São Paulo, also supports this argument, emphasising that "Groups from the Middle East are not on their top list of concerns. The federal police are "target-oriented", so if there is no evidence, they will not pursue an investigation". In concurrence, Participant 3, an Argentine International Relations professional argues that:

> I can understand the political decision to not describe those actors as terrorists. It's trouble and it's fighting that we don't really have to fight

> and it gets the U.S, Israel, European Union to fight. So why should we want to buy this agenda, why should we embrace those sorts of fight right now?

The overall consensus reveals that the TBA countries have been blaming each other for allowing criminal activities to rise in the region for many years, yet achieved very little to counter this effectively. Participants agree that without a combined effort, criminal and terror groups will continue to operate almost unrestricted in the area. With the help of the diaspora, dwelling on high levels of corruption and playing on political disagreements, the crime-terror nexus actors take advantage of the geographical characteristics of the area to engage in a wide range of criminal activities.

6.3 Drivers of criminality

This section evaluates the potential explanations for the involvement of Hezbollah – a state-sponsored terror group - in organised crime. There is a lack of academic literature on this subject, as no work explicitly considers the connection between state-sponsored terrorism and crime. The majority of the academic literature suggests that state sponsorship should decrease the likelihood of a terrorist group engaging in crime, as it reduces the incentives to do so since constant support is received from the state sponsor (Wilner, 2017; Berkowitz, 2017). However, to provide an answer to the second research question of this thesis (What are the potential drivers of criminality behind Hezbollah's involvement in organised crime in the TBA?), this section focuses on participants' responses from two competing perspectives. Based on the information provided by the participants in this study, the researcher divided these factors into necessity versus opportunity-related factors, as shown in Figure 6.3:

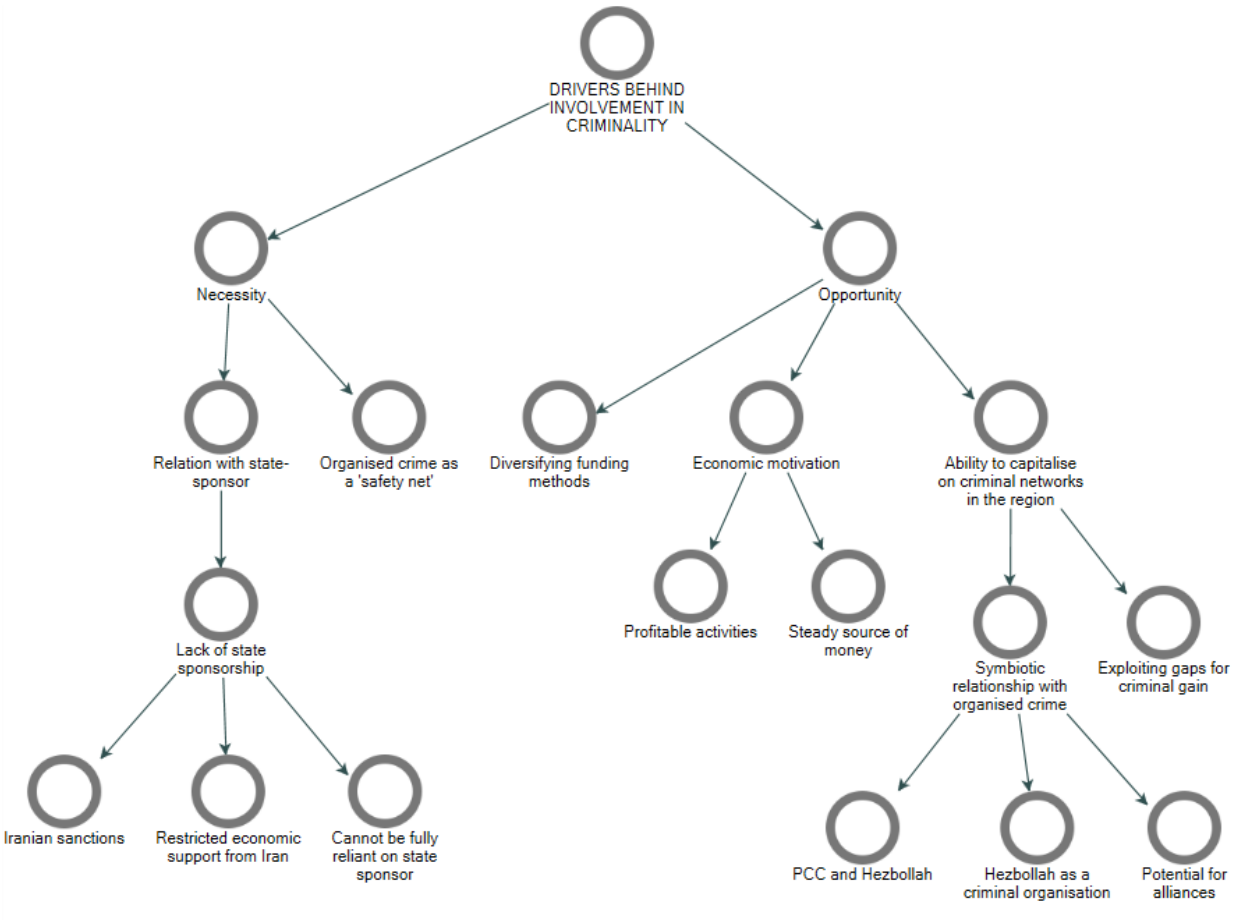

Figure 6.3: Drivers of criminality (Author's own NVivo representation)

6.3.1 Necessity due to the lack of state sponsorship

The current theory on the crime-terror nexus has generally portrayed the development of this phenomenon as being connected to the decline in state sponsorship (Dishman 2001; Makarenko 2004; Hutchinson & O'Malley 2007; Shelley 2014). The literature on terrorism and crime tends to focus on economic necessity as a motivating factor behind the crime-terror nexus (Hausken & Gupta, 2015). One of the key elements to emerge from the interviews was that Hezbollah's involvement in organised crime is partially motivated by necessity. Participant 14, a US academic working in the US Navy, emphasises that "It's a matter of necessity, because you're right, Iran is starting to back away from Hezbollah, as of recent, over the past year, year and a half. So it could be argued that it needs to expand its resources to make sure it can continue operating".

As mentioned previously in Chapter 2, Section 2.6, the Islamic Republic of Iran provides substantial financial assistance while exerting significant pressure on Hezbollah's decision-making (Lucic, 2009; DeVore, 2012). One of the issues that was raised during the interview was raised by Participant 4, a UK academic, is that: "If you're too reliant on one source, then it's very easy for people to cut that off". Indeed, successive US administrations have used economic sanctions to try and change Iran's behaviour. The US sanctions on Iran—primarily "secondary sanctions" on firms that conduct certain transactions with the government — have adversely affected Iran's economy and, implicitly, Hezbollah's source of funding (Katzman, 2021). "As a result, Hezbollah has, in recent years, significantly expanded both its formal and informal criminal enterprises as a means of diversifying its financial portfolio and insulating its budget from the impact of Iranian belt-tightening" (Levitt, 2016, p.155-156). This is once more emphasised by Participant 4, who believes that "[Hezbollah] they're not stupid, you know, and I think they're quite capable of seeing that they can't rely on Iran forever, for either strategic reasons or as you say, for the fact that like Iran's not always in the position to provide sort of support for Hezbollah army". It can be argued that Hezbollah realised that Iran's support is conditional, which made the group cautious of relying entirely on state support. Within this particular context, the development of independent financial capabilities is a sensible decision that diversifies against future risk, a safety net. Participant 5, a Policy Analyst at RAND Corporation, suggests that the support has declined: "It's not like they have like an interminable source of funds there". Terrorist organisations need money to pursue their agendas, and if they lack state-sponsorship, they will turn their attention to other methods of funding, such as drug trafficking:

> Against the backdrop of US sanctions on the Ayatollah's [regime] and the severe economic crisis in Lebanon, the decision to trade drugs seems like a winning horse.[…] Hezbollah's involvement in criminal activity stems primarily from the organisation's need to find sources of funding for its activities and reduce its dependence on Iran (Participant 20, Israeli Academic).

With this in mind, the complicated relationship with the state sponsor led Hezbollah to utilise criminal alliances and engage in a crime-terror nexus to support its agenda. The findings indicate that the decline in state sponsorship is regarded, to a certain extent, as the primary force behind the crime-terror nexus, as the terrorist organisation needs money to function – when these funds are no longer available, involvement in crime becomes a necessity. However, this is not to say that Hezbollah does not take advantage of the opportunities presented by the TBA. This research argues that focusing purely on the necessity to account for the formation of the crime-terror nexus leaves significant gaps in understanding the drivers of criminality of state-sponsored terrorist organisations. Therefore, the following section explores the opportunities that the TBA provides for Hezbollah and how these have affected its involvement in organised crime.

6.3.2 Seizing the Opportunity

A common perception that emerged through data analysis is that the TBA provides plenty of opportunities for Hezbollah to engage in organised criminal activities, regardless of their relationship with the state sponsor. The literature on the crime-terror nexus suggests that the development of this phenomenon is connected to the decline in state-sponsorship following the end of the Cold War (Dishman, 2001; Makarenko, 2004; Hutchinson & O'Malley, 2007; Shelley, 2014). The decline in state sponsorship forced these groups to seek other sources of financial stability and security, prompting them to take advantage of the institutionally weak situation in various states and developing their international networks, seeking lucrative profits (Sanderson, 2004).

Participant 20, an Israeli Academic, opines that "With Iran's pockets behind it, Nasrallah's global drug trade is primarily a 'safety net' for a rainy day". The findings reveal that the engagement in criminal activities is more than a simple response to a lack of state sponsorship; this reflects Hezbollah's tendency to expand its criminal networks and to develop self-sufficiency, which will eventually result in financial independence from Iran. The interviews revealed a variety of factors that explain Hezbollah's involvement in the TBA. Participant 12, a retired Argentine Police Officer,

believes that “[Hezbollah are] taking advantage of the presence of the Arab community in the area and the favourable conditions for criminal activities as a method of financing”. Once again, the existence of trans-border identities enables cross-border crime and creates opportunities to be explored by terrorist organisations and criminal groups alike. Data gathered from interviews suggests that terrorist organisations take advantage of the opportunities presented in the area:

> I think that the more they got involved, the more they saw the opportunity to actually make more money. Right, while we’re laundering, why don't we just take cocaine as a form of payment? Why don't we tap into the criminal networks we are working with, on the other side, to actually become sellers ourselves? (Participant 11, a Political Scientist based in the U.S).

This suggests that Hezbollah’s position as a group with global reach allows them access to varied criminal markets, providing ample opportunities for profit. Moreover, the TBA is a region characterised by loose borders and poor law enforcement, which offers plenty of opportunities for developing a widespread network:

> It’s a geostrategic place for them: if they need to move anywhere in the Americas, they can do it from there. They have rivers, they have connections with Bolivia as well, so it’s very easy for them to move from one place to another. And you take why they go the other way, they would go to the Pacific, yes, of course. But at the same time, if they need to send fire weapons, etc., they can get to different ports. They could go to Callao in Peru, or you know, and that’s important: they can go from the Atlantic to the Pacific (Participant 23, an Argentine academic).

The general consensus is that the TBA offers plenty of opportunities for the nexus to occur, and both terrorist and organised crime leaders decide to exploit these opportunities and successfully create fruitful partnerships in an area that is poorly regulated, easily corrupted and in which criminal activities an easy way to acquire large amounts of money. The lack of attention by the central government and widespread

corruption allows them to buy influence and access (Participant 11, US Political Scientist). Participant 20, an Israeli Academic, also emphasises that “Hezbollah already understood and realized that they had created a smart mechanism that produces a lot of money for them”. He also believes that “The more you are involved, the more opportunities arise for being even more involved”. Overall, the above factors created favourable opportunity structures for Hezbollah’s involvement in organised crime. This is summarised best by a Detective Inspector with the Argentine Airport Security Police, who argues that “It started as an opportunity that has taken hold to stay definitively” (Participant 16).

6.4 Involvement in Organised Crime

This section presents the findings related to research question number 3 (What organised criminal activities does Hezbollah engage in, in the TBA?). As the data presented below demonstrates, Hezbollah engages in multiple organised criminal activities and has created over the years successful partnerships with organised criminal groups in the Tri-Border Area, particularly Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC), the largest Brazilian criminal organisation. Therefore, this section focuses on the activities and the partnerships Hezbollah is involved in, based on the information gathered from interviews (see Figure 6.4). Firstly, this section presents an overview of Hezbollah’s involvement in organised crime in the TBA, based on participants’ interviews. Secondly, it contextualises Hezbollah’s link with the PCC, how this connection evolved and demonstrates how this connection is an important aspect of the crime-terror nexus in the TBA.

Figure 6.4: Hezbollah's involvement in organised crime (Author's own representation)

6.4.1 Operational dynamics of the crime-terror nexus: Hezbollah's involvement in organised crime

The findings indicate that Hezbollah engages in a wide range of criminal activities, including, but not limited to drug trafficking, weapons trafficking, money laundering, tax evasion, and fraud. The activities carried out specifically in the TBA are highlighted in Figure 6.5:

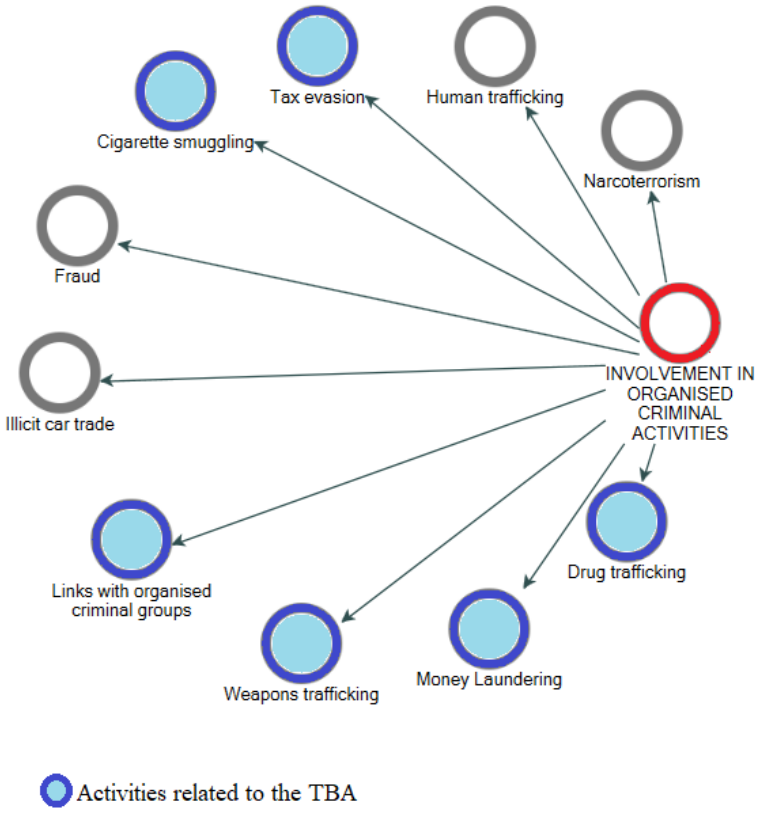

Figure 6.5: NVivo representation of Hezbollah's criminal activities in the Tri-Border Area

Prior research shows that the TBA is a sanctuary for all sorts of organised crime. For example, Gleis and Berti (2012, p. 74) point out that "the tri-border area has been used by Hezbollah, Hamas, and a whole host of other non-state armed groups for a plethora of illicit activities." However, although a variety of illegal activities were mentioned in the interviews, the participants of this study mainly pointed out drug trafficking as the main source of income for Hezbollah in the TBA. Hence, the following section presents participants' reflections on this specific matter.

The importance of the TBA is highlighted by Participant 11, who emphasises that "The area has become more and more important to drug trafficking". Drug trafficking appears to be one of the most lucrative activities in the area, being highlighted that "Nasrallah's drug trafficking is so large that the US State Department

has placed Hezbollah on the list of the five most powerful criminal organisations in the world" (Participant 20, an Israeli Academic). Not only is Hezbollah a terrorist organisation, but it is emphasised that due to its involvement in crime, it is also regarded as a criminal organisation, which requires a different approach to tackling the crime-terror nexus. Yet again, this proves to be difficult considering the differences in opinions presented previously about how Hezbollah is regarded by the TBA governments. The interview data emphasises different positions regarding Hezbollah's designation as a terrorist organisation and bringing into the equation the discourse of being a criminal organisation can also create more friction between the TBA governments.

Notwithstanding, Participant 21, a Police Commissioner in Brazil, explains that evidence of Hezbollah's involvement in drug trafficking dates back years, as he recalls one of his experiences:

> In 2019, I came across information that Hezbollah financed drug trafficking in South America with the main objective of operating money laundering. The surprise was that the discovery made by my team, later, proved to be nothing new, we contacted other security agencies and learned that such information had already existed since the year 2010. […] In 2020, in a police operation investigating international drug trafficking, specifically cocaine, my team and I seized 3 tons of pure cocaine coming from Colombia that, once again, was involved by criminals linked to Hezbollah.

On a similar note, Participant 22, a Special Agent with the Brazilian Federal Police, illustrates one of the operations he had been involved in to emphasise the scale of drug trafficking operations:

> Back in 2016, I was working in Brazil in São Paulo International Airport and it's been a seizure. A lot of drugs - cocaine, going into Middle East, especially to Lebanon and Syria. We don't know the end of the story, how they will distribute the drugs there. But there were huge amounts of

> drugs, like 200 kilos in a single bag, which means, full of cocaine, nothing else - just cocaine and one blanket covering the drug.

Loose border regulations and more than 100 clandestine airstrips allow drug smugglers easy transit through the area, as pointed out in the Chapter Five (Kleck, 2011). One drug smuggling route brings Andean cocaine through Ciudad del Este and Foz do Iguaçu to the Atlantic ports of Paranaque, Santos, and Rio de Janeiro. Participant 22 drew on his experience as a Special Agent with the Brazilian Federal Police and explains the scale of illegal operations:

> The drugs come to Brazil and leave by port, which is Santos, it's the biggest one. I have seized in a lot, loads of cocaine going into Middle East. And the same thing in the airport, Guarulhos Airport, they send the drugs – it's a very known route […] Back in 2016, I was working in Brazil at São Paulo International Airport and it's been a seizure. A lot of drugs - cocaine, going into Middle East, especially to Lebanon and Syria.

To emphasise the importance of this issue, Participant 21, a Police Commissioner in Brazil, estimates that "for every ton of cocaine seized in Brazil, another 10 tons managed to be shipped abroad (the USA or Europe)". The lucrative business of the drug trade is also emphasised by other participants, who explain that "Drugs are just so profitable. That's the problem. You know, you get eight grams of cocaine and you cut it with flour, or you cut it with powdered sugar. And you've got 16 grams. " (Participant 2, a US researcher). Undeniably, drugs have always been cut with substances by dealers to make as much profit as possible. When cut, the profit margin on their initial outlay increases significantly. The profitability of drug trafficking is also emphasised by Participant 15, a Special Agent with the Brazilian Federal Police who points out that "[…] you can buy a kilo of cocaine for US$ 2,000 in Bolivia, and sell it for US$ 40 – 45,000 in Europe. So that's the margin that they have." Although the numbers slightly differ, Participant 20, an Israeli Academic, also emphasises the high profits the organisation achieves from drug trafficking: "International drug trafficking destined for the USA and Europe is extremely profitable, especially when it comes to cocaine, currently one kg of cocaine costs, on average, US$2,300, arrives

in Brazil at a cost of US$ 30,000 and is sold in Europe for over $75,000 - that's for pure cocaine". When cut with other substances to increase the amount of drugs to be sold, the profits also increase significantly. In this sense, drug trafficking becomes a major source of revenue.

When discussing the scale of drug trafficking that occurs in the TBA, a common subtheme that emerged from interview data is the importance of Paraguay as a base in which to conduct criminal activities from. Participant 1, working with the Argentine Financial Intelligence Unit, points out that "it's much easier to operate in Paraguay for these organisations". Yet again, issues discussed previously, such as corruption, impunity and lack of effective overseeing mechanism, are brought into perspective. Participant 22, a Special Agent with the Brazilian Federal Police explains best the importance of Paraguay in the grand scheme of things:

> Paraguay, it is the door, I would say the door to bring drugs and weapons in Brazil, not only in Brazil, but also in Argentina, or in Bolivia. Paraguay serves as a base for the drug dealers that have sent drugs from Bolivia, Venezuela, Colombia. They are [..] an intermediate base; then from Paraguay they distribute the drugs to Brazil, Argentina, mostly, I would say 90% to Brazil.

Most of the cocaine smuggled out of Paraguay leaves the country through border towns to the north of the TBA, Pedro Juan Caballero and Capitán Bado, centres for the production of marijuana and distribution of cocaine. Participant 12, a retired Argentine Police Officer, emphasises that "Hezbollah's main profitable activity in the area was the cultivation of marijuana. The Paraguayan town of Pedro Juan Caballero is the area under the control of Hezbollah and members of the community, of whose product 70% is sent through money exchange houses to Lebanon to support activities while 30% re-enter the national circuit".

The importance of drug trafficking, particularly marijuana, is also emphasised by Participant 10, Professor of Law in Rio de Janeiro, who points out that "We have much more marihuana passing from Paraguay to Brazil than cocaine". Participant 9 also illustrates this issue by using examples of his previous role within the Argentine

Drug Enforcement: “I was part of an operation with Argentinian law enforcement officers inside Paraguay to dismantle marijuana plantations. So the agreements are available. The thing is the willingness to use them on the field, to eradicate this problem. But I must say that this is not a lot.” Once more, the lack of interest in curbing these activities is prevalent. Similarly, Participant 12, a retired Argentine Police Officer, mentions that “I mean the corruption of countries like Paraguay where there is an entire province with thousands of hectares where the sheiks grow marijuana and the state is incapable of taking action.”. The evidence gathered from interviews points out that Paraguay is a weak link where prevalent levels of corruption, ineffective and unsuitable policies, as well as a predisposition to ‘turn a blind eye’ to illegal activities allow for the crime-terror nexus to flourish and for terrorist organisations to capitalise on profitable criminal opportunities.

6.4.2 Primeiro Comando da Capital and Hezbollah

A controversial topic that has been raised during data analysis is the association between Hezbollah and Brazil’s most fearful organised criminal group, Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC). There are arguments, which suggest that “Lebanese operate side by side with our PCC, for instance, the largest criminal organisation in the continent. […] There is a connection” (Participant 15, a Special Agent with the Brazilian Federal Police). Participant 16, a Detective Inspector with the Argentine Airport Security Police, mentions that “[The] link between the PCC and Hezbollah is very strong and they are closely linked”, a view also shared by a Brazilian researcher, who emphasises that “We have PCC which is the most important and most powerful criminal group narco-trafficking group of Latin America right now. And they got the contact there. Sometimes they [Hezbollah] are working with them too” (Participant 7).

According to the literature presented in the Context Chapter, the connection between Hezbollah and PCC started in 2006, as Lebanese drug traffickers linked with Hezbollah’s facilitators operating in TBA have assisted PCC in obtaining weapons through international arms smuggling channels. In exchange, PCC would have protected Lebanese inmates detained in the Brazilian prison system, as explained in

Chapter Five (Gurney, 2014; Leali, 2014; Palmer, 2016; Levitt, 2016). Some experts state that the Lebanese weapons traffickers based in TBA have been selling arms and explosives to PCC ever since (Vianna de Azevedo, 2018; Coutinho, 2019). Participant 15 explains this connection and provided a comprehensive account of their relationship:

> Allegedly, their first contact was 15 years ago, in the prison system in São Paulo: there was some two federal police operations of transnational trafficking of cocaine, in which there were a lot of Lebanese arrested, and they were convicted, put in jail, where they met the PCC guys. So the PCC killed one of them, those Lebanese, because there were competitors in the drug, illicit drug market. And then allegedly would have come forward and said to PCC leaders 'Look, we need these guys. They're important middlemen, we need them. In five, six years, when their sentences are completed, and they will be freed, we need them back to our business. So we need you to protect them and what you want in exchange?'. And PCC would have asked for heavier weaponry and bomb-making capabilities.

According to some sources, PCC has allegedly been making its moves with Hezbollah's facilitators to articulate cocaine shipments through Brazilian territory, in exchange for weapons (Vianna de Azevedo, 2018). Participant 24, a Captain in the Brazilian Army, points out that "Hezbollah is the main responsible [actor] for the international distribution of the drugs sold by PCC, which is very profitable. […] Hezbollah offers to PCC the international network it has." Hezbollah's involvement in these illicit activities opens up an opportunity for Hezbollah to act outside Lebanon, and in a partnership with PCC, Hezbollah acts as a logistical distributor that enables drug trade abroad (Desideri, 2019). Participant 24 goes on to explain the mutually beneficial relationship between the two organisations by pointing out that:

> PCC has inside connections in most of these [law enforcement] agencies. Everything PCC has when it comes to information, Hezbollah indirectly has as well, because they share their intelligence. PCC has a

> very strong, professional and well-structured intelligence cell with worldwide connections.

This relationship consolidates the crime-terror nexus in the TBA, and facilitates the creation of profitable partnerships in the area. One common perception about the PCC is that the group is extremely powerful and has established strongholds around the TBA, spreading slowly throughout Latin America. This view is expressed by Participant 22, who drew on his experience within the Federal Police to explain that the "PCC has spread its network, not only in all states in Brazil, but also Paraguay, Bolivia or even in the US" He also mentioned that in Brazil:

> PCC is so powerful that they threat the family of every single police officer in the region, they monitor their wives and kids in a daily basis. With their families under the influence of PCC many police officers do as they are told to do by this criminal organization. With that in mind, it is difficult to know who is reliable within one organization in Brazil, let alone the dozens of international security agencies that operate in the region.

To emphasise that the PCC is not only an issue in Brazil, Participant 15 points out that "PCC is a problem in Paraguay. Paraguay is just now starting to grasp what PCC is". This highlights the international dimension of this group, and building a strong partnership with Hezbollah can result in a strong resilience to disruption and more concerns for law enforcement who currently do not have the capacities to deal with these threats. On the other hand, Hezbollah benefits from this partnership as a source of financing and an opportunity to capitalise on existing illegal opportunities to generate profits.

Nevertheless, there is still insufficient evidence to validate a direct connection between Hezbollah and PCC. Some participants could not confirm the existence of links, due to constraints on their investigative resources and capabilities. Participant 10, a Professor of Law in Brazil, mentions that "I don't know if the relationship between PCC and Hezbollah has been properly documented or academically documented", while Participant 8, a Brazilian academic, argues that "No one could confirm this information". Participant 15, a Special Agent with the Brazilian Federal Police concurs:

“In my position, my personal position is that you’re right. There is a connection. It was never approved, law enforcement wise.”

Moreover, some participants felt reluctant to acknowledge this connection. A Brazilian academic suggests that “So speaking with you right now, yes, there is this connection. I will never say this in the press. I’ll never say this in public. Especially because I think it’s not that organised” (Participant 7). Similarly, a member of the Argentine Financial Intelligence Unit, explains that “I mean, we cannot speak about this, but I have to say it, in a broad image, that they have relationships with drug trafficking organisations from Brazil, that is Primeiro Comando da Capital PCC” (Participant 1). More subtly, Participant 21, a Police Commissioner in Brazil, emphasises that “Our intelligence team did not identify links with the main criminal factions in Brazil, which are Comando Vermelho and Primeiro Comando da Capital, both active in national and international trafficking. But it is unlikely that there is no link between the various criminal organisations involved”.

When discussing this connection and its relevance, Participant 15 used his experience as a Federal Agent in Brazil to highlight the difficulty law enforcement agencies encounter when dealing with the crime-terror nexus between PCC and Hezbollah, explaining that the link cannot be entirely proved:

> If we keep on digging, we'll find something and I think it's a matter of time until this is proven. But you know, we prove in a way that okay, you will find it in the literature, Lebanese drug traffickers and PCC involved, you will find that if you Google it, but you will not find a proof that these Lebanese are Hezbollah members. Yeah, this right! This is like when I talked to law enforcement agencies in the European Union they say the same: it’s very hard for them to prove someone is a Hezbollah operator.

6.5 Initiatives

The key element to emerge from the interviews is that the crime-terror nexus flourishes in the TBA. Organised criminal groups, and terrorist organisations alike, exploit the underdeveloped rule of law and institutions, the weak fiscal capacity,

extensive corruption and the populations susceptible to participation in illicit economies. Terrorists draw a certain amount from friendly citizens, and their alliances with organised criminal groups in the Tri-Border Area give them great flexibility, a regular cash flow and safe territory to operate in. To answer the fourth research question of this study (What are the key informants' perceptions of the initiatives designed to tackle the crime-terror nexus in the TBA?), the researcher presents the findings from two perspectives: introducing the factors that impede the implementation of effective counter-strategies, followed by an overview of participants' perceptions of how these can improve and what can be done to fight the crime-terror nexus effectively. Findings based on participants' answers show several obstacles in the fight against the crime-terror nexus (see Figure 6.6). A common similarity encountered during data analysis is that some of the factors that facilitate the formation of the crime-terror nexus in the region are also responsible for how this phenomenon is tackled and implicitly affect the effectiveness of the strategies developed. This section also presents an overview of some of the initiatives developed over the years to fight the crime-terror nexus and how participants regard these responses in terms of effectiveness.

Figure 6.6: Obstacles that impede the fight against the crime-terror nexus (Author's own representation)

6.5.1 Fighting the Nexus: Frustrations, Obstacles and Pitfalls

The key element to emerge from the interviews is that there is a consensus that the law enforcement agencies in the region lack sufficient resources and cooperation when it comes to fighting the crime-terror nexus. Participant 13, a Lebanese researcher, emphasises that the initiatives are not sufficient nor effective, “not in the presence of high levels of poverty, internal feuds, corruption, along the lack of joint counter-terrorism training and intelligence gathering/sharing among the Tri-border countries”. There is a shared level of scepticism about the effectiveness of initiatives deployed in the area, as a UK researcher points out that “In some ways, I’m quite sceptical about efforts to address the crime-terror nexus that come from a sort of either a military or a policeman background, to be honest” (Participant 4). A similar view is shared by participant 11, who opines that “I don’t think there is a real initiative.”

This perception is shared by multiple participants, who emphasise that the lack of effectiveness is exacerbated by a lack of human and institutional capacity, lack of training and resources, low salaries, and weak controls and oversight. The combination of poor pay, difficult working conditions and the lack of governmental agreement provides both incentives and opportunities for corruption, as pointed out by Participant 5, a Policy Analyst at RAND Corporation:

> “In the end, these areas have been so plagued by ambiguity and by lack of governance, that they were pretty frustrated by a lot of corruption in those police forces, by lacking criminal justice systems, by lack of government agreement, because it takes also agreement to police a tri border area, low resources, poor pay, insufficient training and equipment, and just for organisations. So in the end, I think those efforts ended up failing”.

Data gathered from interviews suggests that, unlike Western countries, the TBA governments are poorly coordinated: “Western countries have an easier time of coordinating resources, the likes of Uruguay, Brazil, Paraguay, Argentina, might not have that full, robust ability to share resources as actively as you can see Western

countries doing" (Participant 14, a US researcher working for the US Navy). Similarly, Participant 22 used his experience as a Special Agent with the Brazilian Federal Police and argued that the Latin American environment "it's a bit different from Europe or the US There are a lot of problems and lack of resources, not only material resources but human resources, as well. And, of course, with the problem of corruption, it's hard work to do".

The issue of corruption as an obstacle to tackling the crime-terror nexus is also emphasised by an Israeli Academic and Intelligence Analyst (Participant 20), who believes that:

> Their [law enforcement] efforts have been hindered by endemic corruption within the police, criminal justice systems, and governments of the Tri-Border Area countries. You have poor pay; inadequate training, no equipment or funding, very poor organisation, human rights abuses, weak anti-money-laundering laws and secrecy provisions of banking laws; with the exception of Paraguay – their problem has more to do with not reporting suspicious financial activities.

Another issue raised by the interviewees is the lack of cooperation between the three countries. Participant 20 explains that "The local efforts are too weak and not enough to tackle the criminal activity that takes place in the Tri-Border Area. It needed and international cooperation in order to do that". Some participants agree that there is a level of cooperation in the Tri-Border Area, as Participant 21, a Police Commissioner in Brazil emphasises that "There is cooperation, there is no doubt, but the work is not enough." The lack of sufficient and comprehensive cooperation is brought into discussion, which emphasises the deficiency of the Tri-Border Area governments in sharing intelligence and working together to counter the crime-terror nexus.

Although there is evidence of some cooperation, as emphasised in the Context Chapter, this view is met with doubt by Participant 15, who drew on his experience as Special Agent with the Brazilian Federal Police, pointing out that "Cooperation among countries - law enforcement wise, or intelligence wise- is not the norm. They are

actually counterintuitive because countries do not desire to cooperate in intelligence, unless they have to do so". Participant 10 drew on his extensive knowledge of policing, arguing that "it's very hard to create a common ground for cooperation between the institutions." His argument is supported by a Brazilian Army Captain (Participant 24), who expresses that "We still lack integration among the countries and integrated intelligence. The bonds of trust among the police forces from the three countries are still very fragile".

Moreover, some participants believe that the lack of cooperation is due to high levels of corruption. A retired Argentine Police Officer emphasises that:

> "Not only is there no cooperation but there is also no interest because part of that money obtained as a result of laundering is used to feed the regional economies and in the case of Paraguay we find that the Army of that country is the one in charge of providing protection of the cultivation areas with which we are facing a multidimensional problem".

The view is also shared by Participant 19, a Research Analyst with InsightCrime, who points out that although some levels of cooperation exist, they are dampened by high levels of corruption, particularly in Paraguay:

> Paraguay has had several significant Hezbollah operatives residing within its borders. However, it appears to have cooperated with arrest requests made abroad, especially those made by the US Paraguay has also prosecuted and imprisoned several Hezbollah agents, but has also quickly lost track of them once released, whether planned or accidental.

Another key element, which emerged during data analysis, is the lack of resources allocated to the law enforcement agencies to fight the crime-terror nexus. It has been brought to attention by Participant 22, a Special Agent with the Brazilian Federal Police, that "they have a lot of lack of resources, it is hard to provide these resources, training capacitation, even, you know, material resource, like cars, boats, everything really". Participant 10 provides a real-life example gathered from personal experiences, pointing out the inadequacies and lack of resources Brazil faces:

> Once, this female, a woman, she was a police officer. She works in the state police of Amazonas, responsible for investigation. And she once told me: 'I do not have anything; I do not have boats or even enough guns to do an operation'. Because in that region the Armed Forces remain responsible for establishing the presence of the state and even keeping the water [safe], she says: 'Sometimes you need to do an operation, I need to ask them if the police could borrow me a boat to do this'.

From an academic point of view, Participant 23 concurs, emphasising that the law enforcement "They're completely unequipped. Not only that, they lack education. I mean, what I'm trying to say is: if you just have training for three months, and then you're given a gun, are you prepared for fighting crime?" Indeed, this is a critical point to consider, as the lack of sufficient training, legitimacy and transparency of the security forces results in social instability in the region, and it perpetuates an environment conducive to illegal activities.

When discussing with participants from Brazil, they stress that due to its dimensions and large porous borders, Brazil encounters plenty of difficulties in regulating the crime-terror nexus. Participant 21, a police commissioner, points out that "Brazil is a country with the territorial dimensions of a continent. Our eastern border borders most countries in South America and is more than 17,000 kilometres long between forests and rivers. There is not enough technology and staff to cover this entire area." The lack of sufficient human resources to efficiently regulate the area is an important aspect in the fight against the illegalities that occur in the region, as it was emphasised that "The Federal Police has only 11,000 officers in Brazil. Imagine 11,000 officers to tackle a border of 17,000 kilometres" (Participant 10, a Brazilian academic).

The problems of borders and jurisdiction were also raised during interviews. Cross-border criminality involves the intentional use of the border to evade detection and capture. As criminals extend their activity beyond the principle of territoriality, there is a significant need for cooperation between the law enforcement agencies of the TBA

countries. However, negative examples show that there is a lack of practical cross-border arrangements for efficient collaboration between law enforcement agencies operating in the TBA. One interview brought up an example, which clearly emphasises the particular challenges that law enforcement officers face in their pursuit of criminals across borders:

> I had a couple of friends that were arrested in Paraguay because they were following criminals that were in Brazil and then they crossed the border. But as you may know, it's like you can't see the border, you just cross without knowing and then the Paraguayan police arrested them just because they crossed and they were following the criminals. So they were supporting these criminals.[…] But that's the reality. You cannot just stop once you see, you know, 'this is the border, I have to stop here' (Participant 22, Special Agent with the Brazilian Federal Police).

It was also emphasised that information sharing is not usually the norm between the agencies operating in the TBA. Various barriers between the jurisdictions of law enforcement contribute to the vulnerability of the TBA, and most efforts have often been impeded by the diverse legal systems, police organisational structures and material resources, and the lack of formal communication channels and information exchange. In addition, law enforcement personnel are in vulnerable positions and are tempted by various forms of corruption. One interviewee highlights that:

> The security forces cannot cross the borders freely. For example, if I am carrying out a special reconnaissance operation in the area, by law I need to operate on the Brazilian side. If I find some clues that lead me to the Paraguayan or Argentinian part of the region, I need to contact my superiors and ask for permission to cross the border or to share this information with the other country. Hezbollah takes advantage of this lack of mobility of the security agencies. This enables the criminal groups in the area to run away from one side to the other without difficulty. The security agencies in the region are also scarce and not properly equipped. On the other hand, the criminal groups have state-of-the-art

> tools to operate: heavy weapons, trucks and fast boats. This means, when confronted by the security forces from one country, they can react and run away to another country and hide themselves easily (Participant 24, Captain in the Brazilian Army).

6.5.2 The need for cooperation

Findings reveal an increased recognition of the need to coordinate initiatives to combat the crime-terror nexus in the region. Drawing on his experience as a Special Agent in the Brazilian Federal Police, Participant 15 suggests that "You need a network to fight another network. So fighting Hezbollah as a network, we need to be networked." There is a strong need for the implementation of effective strategies that would make crime-terror interaction less profitable and riskier for the individuals and organisations involved. However, these objectives cannot be achieved if agencies dedicated to fighting this are not cooperating, either nationally or internationally. It became evident through data analysis that the lack of cooperation between government and agencies is a prevailing theme and that interview candidates felt that the level of cooperation between the law enforcement agencies in the TBA is not sufficient. For example, it was emphasised that:

> Absolutely not enough [cooperation]! Each and every country in the Tri-Border Area suffer from inside widespread corruption at all levels of government and law enforcement. The three countries are facilitating the activities of terrorist groups and organised crime in the Tri-Border Area. Also, their law enforcement capabilities and investigative forces in the TBA are inadequate for clearing the region of organised crime groups, terrorist groups, and corrupt officials who do business with them (Participant 20, Israeli Academic).

Although the idea of cooperation is met with scepticism by the majority of the participants in this study, there is evidence that in the Tri-Border Area, some cooperation already occurs in a variety of ways, for example, through the establishment of fusion centres, which integrate information and expertise from

various law enforcement agencies into a single hub. Similar to what had been pointed out in the Context Chapter, Participant 15 also points out that:

> As throughout the time, I could clearly see that the way to tackle the crime-terror nexus in the Tri-Border Area has evolved. It has clear level and two things make me believe that we're going in the right direction. The first was two years ago when Brazil created a Fusion Centre in Foz do Iguaçu […]. And that fusion centre is something that is new from Brazilian perspective. […] this fusion centre in Foz do Iguaçu that is staffed by not only law enforcement officers from different parts of Brazil, but also military intelligence, intelligence agency, Brazilian intelligence agency, IRS, road patrol and the neighbouring countries Paraguay and Argentina.

The fusion centre became a significant element, as candidates feel that it is a relevant initiative that provides authorities with essential opportunities for intelligence sharing and, especially when law enforcement agencies can work together, allowing a smooth process of coordination and cooperation between them, to develop efforts to combat organised crime and terrorism. Moreover, other initiatives were discussed, which participants deemed successful. Participant 11, a Political Scientist based in the US, directed the attention toward The Tripartite Command and suggests that "Generally speaking, there are very few tools there, there is a formal mechanism called the Tri Partite Commands - El Comando Tripartito, which enables the three countries to have some dialogue and exchange of information". Similarly, it has been pointed out that:

> In 2019 Brazil launched the initiative "Programa Nacional de Segurança nas Fronteiras", in English "National Borders Security Program", to handle the crime in this region. In the last two years, the security forces captured 870 tons of drugs, 113 millions of cigarette packets and other significant criminal apprehensions. This program consists on the integration of the security forces from the three countries to tackle the

criminal activities in the Tri-Border Area (Participant 24, a Captain in the Brazilian Army).

Although this seems promising, some respondents expressed their scepticism about the effectiveness of these initiatives, pointing out that even if the governments will come to an agreement and devise common strategies to tackle the crime-terror nexus, their effectiveness on the field is questionable: “In high level, they [governments] will work to finally doing something, but on the ground, in the field, there is no such action as to combat, to combat these illegal activities” (Participant 22, a Special Agent with the Brazilian Federal Police).

Despite the efforts to tackle the crime-terror nexus that have been made over the years, the general consensus is that these efforts have not been sufficient nor enough, partly due to the inability of law enforcement agencies to cooperate effectively in a trustful manner. This view also manifested in related responses from the interviews: Participant 18, an anti-fraud and anti-money laundering specialist from Brazil, points out that “Nothing is sufficient in a world where you can’t trust in almost anyone.” It became evident that the participants believe that the lack of trust between the agencies is a barrier that hinders law enforcement efforts in the area. Participant 24 comments that “We still lack integration among the countries and integrated intelligence. The bonds of trust among the police forces from the three countries are still very fragile.” This is also shared by other participants, who point out that “Traditionally speaking, the countries in the region do not have a very strong tradition and habit of sharing sensitive information among themselves, of cooperating with, with other countries on sensitive information.” (Participant 11). These views are individualised opinions regarding the barriers that hinder effective cooperation between law enforcement agencies. Their concerns and frustrations bear relation to the lack of trust, and conflicting views between policies and structures established in the TBA.

Nonetheless, some of the interviewees mentioned that the tri-border countries are joining efforts to tackle the crime-terror nexus, particularly with the designation of

Hezbollah as a terrorist organisation by Argentina and Paraguay, which facilitated international cooperation:

> When Paraguay and Argentina designated Hezbollah as a terrorist organisation, that also helped a lot because their intelligence, their law enforcement, their military, they can pull the information on Hezbollah because it's their mandate to do so. So they are more keen on sharing information, and pushing in a way, pulling Brazil together to work with them in these issues. So I think that the cross country integration is the main action against TCOs and terror groups in Tri-Border Area (Participant 15, a Brazil Federal Agent)

The importance of this is also described by a Research Analyst with InsightCrime, who states that “Already in 2018, the arrest of part of the Barakat clan network represented an advance in the police coordination of Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay in the shared border area, and the steps of 2019 [Hezbollah’s designation as a terrorist organsiation] constitute a decisive action” (Participant 19).

The overall data shows that although met with scepticism, the tri-border governments have designed initiatives that have been, to a certain extent, seen as effective in combating the crime-terror nexus in the region, particularly after Hezbollah’s designation as a terrorist organisation. Nonetheless, there is a consensus that the lack of resources and cooperation, the high level of corruption in the three countries, jurisdiction issues and mistrust between the law enforcement agencies have hindered these efforts and have not been sufficient to effectively counter the crime-terror nexus in the region.

6.6 Summary

This chapter discussed the data analysis and findings, and provided an overview of participants’ perceptions about the crime-terror nexus in the TBA. Data have shown that the geographical attributes of the area, coupled with the existence of an Arab community, high levels of corruption and impunity, and where political disagreements hinder law enforcement efforts, characterise the TBA as a “paradise”

for the formation of the crime-terror nexus. Consequently, the TBA can be regarded as a “black hole”, a perfect environment for the convergence of crime and terrorism.

Findings indicate that driven by both necessity due to a decrease in state-sponsorship, as well as opportunity, Hezbollah has taken advantage of this region to create fruitful criminal partnerships and to engage in a wide range of criminal activities. The participants in this study agree that the efforts to combat the crime-terror nexus had been, so far, unsuccessful. Although some initiatives have proven to be effective, such as the fusion centres, their overall success is met with scepticism by the majority of the participants, who believe that the lack of resources and cooperation, as well as the high level of corruption and mistrust between law enforcement agencies, hinder all these efforts, which in turn provide more opportunities for the crime-terror nexus to flourish.

This chapter has made significant findings that merit a fuller discussion in relation to the academic literature. The following chapter presents a critical discussion of the findings and their links to the existing literature to determine whether the data analysed in this chapter supports or contradicts the existing information presented in previous chapters.

CHAPTER 7: Discussion

This chapter discusses the findings of this study and considers in which areas they shed light on, furthering current understanding and knowledge of the crime-terror nexus. The overlap between criminal and terrorist networks is well established, and it is neither new nor surprising. As indicated in Chapter Two, academics have shown an increased interest in how the crime-terror nexus occurs, placing particular emphasis on the types of relationships that develop between organised criminal groups and terrorist organisations. However, as Chapter Six has demonstrated, the case study of Hezbollah's activities in the Tri-Border Area offers a unique contribution to the contemporary debates in this field.

This chapter provides a critical analysis of the findings gathered from primary data. It reviews the main findings presented in the previous chapter by evaluating and interpreting the data, and where applicable, links the literature to the research objectives of this study. Consequently, this chapter makes its main contribution in two main areas. Firstly, it examines the factors that influence the formation of the crime-terror nexus, including a re-examination of the 'black hole' theory (Makarenko, 2004). Secondly, this chapter also considers the concept of 'criminal entrepreneurship' by examining the factors that lead to a state-sponsored terrorist organisation's decision to engage in criminal activities and form criminal partnerships with organised criminal groups. The findings of this thesis are discussed in greater detail below, although it is worth noting that in some instances, they have supported, and in others, have challenged the hypothesis made in the literature. Hence, this thesis presents a significant study on the development of the crime-terror nexus field as a whole.

7.1 The 'Black hole' Theory – A re-examination

The relationship between terrorist and organised criminal groups has been the subject of attention in academia, focusing primarily on models of interaction between the two (Makarenko, 2004; Hutchison & O'Malley, 2007; Shelley & Picarelli, 2005). However, the context in which these two overlap is highly debated. Since the terror attacks of September 11th 2001, counterterrorism policy has been concerned with the

concept of “black holes”, usually referred to as terrorist sanctuaries or safe havens (Campana & Ducol, 2011; Innes, 2007; Korteweg, 2008; Piazza, 2008). The overall argument suggests that these spaces are a cause of concern as they provide terrorist organisations with opportunities to train, organise, acquire revenue, and plan attacks. Precise definitions of the “black hole” areas have been presented in Chapter 2, and although they are debatable and highly controversial, at the most basic level, they share the notion that in such spaces, legitimate government influence is extremely weak and unable to assert control over these illegal groups.

For the purpose of this thesis, one should consider Makarenko’s definition of a “black hole”, as she suggests that the “black hole” syndrome reflects to situations “in which weak or failed states foster the convergence between transnational organised crime and terrorism, and ultimately create a safe-haven for the continued operations of convergent groups”. The literature presented in Chapter Two advocates that crucial to the emergence of a black hole is a weak or failed state where government authority, legitimacy and territorial control has been considerably challenged. In this situation, various state mechanisms, such as the political system or the legitimate monopoly over the use of violence, become susceptible to the relative power exerted by terrorist or criminal groups in the area. Hence, a weak or a failed state provides the perfect ground allowing the crime-terror nexus to develop and flourish, and creates a ‘safe haven’ for such groups where they continue their operations largely unimpeded. The “black hole syndrome” proposed by Makarenko (2004) represents a threat to international security. Referring specifically to the merging of organised crime and terrorism, the “black hole” theory suggests that this nexus takes place in a weak or failed state unable of countering these groups, fostering the conditions for the development and success of their criminal operations and partnerships.

In almost every conceptualisation of a “black hole”, the state is regarded as either ‘weak’, ‘fragile’ or ‘failed’, providing the perfect ground for the crime-terror nexus to take place. Despite the large body of scholarly writings on the subject, there is no agreement on the definition of state failure (Torres & Anderson, 2004; Di John, 2010; Aman & Aman, 2015). The most widely accepted definition is that offered by Zartman (1995), who defines failure as occurring when “the basic functions of the state are no

longer performed". In other words, a failed state is characterised by the inability of the government to provide essential services. The literature describes a weak or fragile state as a state whose government cannot provide its citizens with essential services and security. According to Rotberg (2004, p.1), states are considered failed "when they are consumed by internal violence and cease delivering positive political goods to their inhabitants". As a result, violence is characteristic for 'failed states'. Other indicators would be a collapsed government, the loss of government control over its territory, high rates of criminal violence and the rise of warlords, lack of medical and educational facilities, and a declining GDP per capita (Rotberg, 2004, p.4). Institutional failures impact different areas of activity, undermining the state's credibility, legitimacy, and stability, which in turn affects economic activity. Fragility then becomes associated with weak institutions, unstable political regimes, low state legitimacy, and economic decline.

The existing literature conceptualising black hole areas and their relations to terrorism is highly preoccupied with assessing state-level paradigms. In other words, variables considered and studied throughout literature almost homogenously refer to some attributes of the state (the fact that they are fragile or failed, the absence of central authority capable of providing law and order, high levels of instability). The general thought is that the environment generated in certain states with weak governance capabilities allow the presence of terrorist groups in these area and are conducive to their illegal activities. However, this conceptualisation of the crime-terror nexus does not consider that black holes can appear outside of weak or failed states.

This chapter offers a critique of this limited model, arguing that theoretical formulations of black holes are based on the wrong presumptions that these "black holes" can develop only in fragile or failed states. This study doubts the absolute usefulness of talking about 'failed' or 'weak' states when considering the crime-terror nexus and recognises that it is essential to take a different perspective when examining these spaces. This study suggests that when discussing "black holes", it is important to concentrate on ungoverned areas rather than states in their entirety. This study identifies areas, rather than entire states, as places where the crime-terror nexus can develop effortlessly. Low levels of government controls first characterise these

areas and, secondly, they possess specific features making the area attractive for the development of crime-terror nexus. Both governmental weaknesses and the advantages of the area allow both criminal and terrorist groups freedom of movement, which forms the key attribute of a particular area and facilitates the formation of the crime-terror nexus.

Turning the attention to the Tri-Border Area (TBA) of Latin America, this is a prime example where the convergence of criminal and terrorist entities is no longer restricted to the weak or failing states. Like many other countries in Latin America, the TBA countries have gone through economic crises and political instability, but they have also experienced episodes of economic stability, political reorganisation and reforms. This seems to be confirmed by the data, as when describing the TBA, Participant 11, a Political Scientist, pointed out that "it is a fairly developed area" with "a fairly affluent middle class and all the trappings of a developed world". This suggests that at present times, the TBA countries are not weak nor failed. Moreover, the Fragile States Index classes Argentina as a stable country, while Brazil and Paraguay show minor signs of fragility (See Figure 7.1).

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Figure 7.1: The Tri-Border Area countries on the Fragile State Index (2021)

Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay are three democratic states, with relatively large, functioning economies. The TBA is described as having "established trade and commerce, logistics […] three international airports - one that handles almost exclusively cargo, large volumes of cargo, commercial, and the other ones that handle

millions of passengers a year because of the tourism industry, and also the Tri-Border Area is a centre for the production of electricity from the hydroelectric dam." (Participant 11, Political Scientist based in the US). This emphasises the level of socio-economic development in the area, which suggests that, to a certain extent, the TBA is not a weak environment. Moreover, according to the World Bank (2021), all three countries score in the upper-middle-income economies (See Figure 7.2). Paraguay's economy was expected to expand by 5% in 2021 (Ross, 2021). FDI (2020) ranks Brazil 12th largest economy in the world, with the highest gross domestic product (GPD) in the Latin American and Caribbean countries, while Argentina ranks number three (See Figure 7.3). This seems to echo the views of Participant 10, who emphasises that Brazil is "performing well, in a lot of social and economic development". Participant 9 seems to follow closely on this, emphasising that in Latin America, Brazil is "the regional superpower and aspiring power to the global ranking of superpowers". Hence, in the light of this evidence, this study argues that the "black hole" can also be applied to more economically and stable environments.

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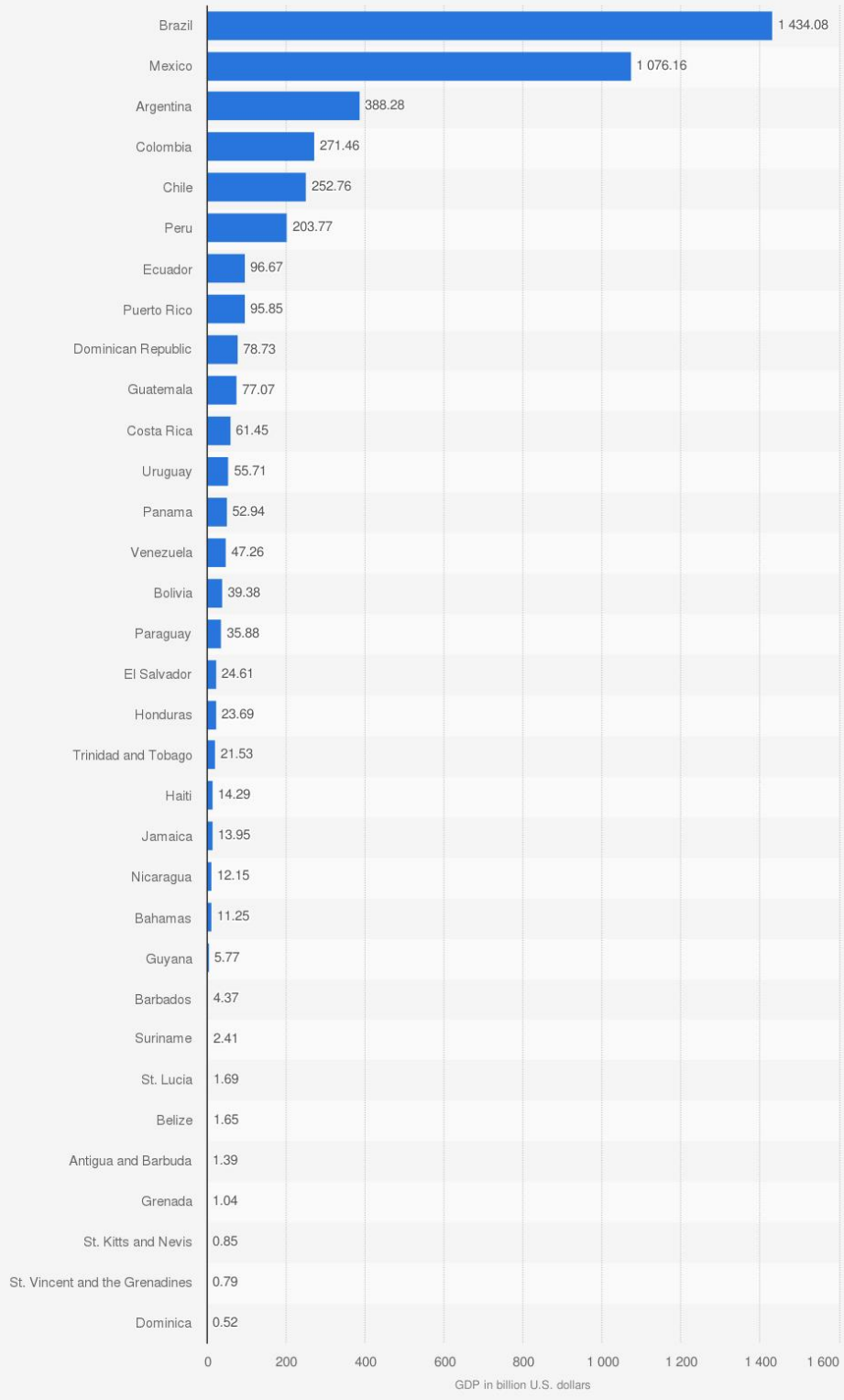
Figure 7.2: The Tri-Border Area countries' economic status (World Bank, 2021)

Gross domestic product (GDP) in Latin America and the Caribbean in 2020, by country (in billion U.S. dollars)



Source
IMF
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Additional Information:
2020; based on current prices

Figure 7.3: GDP Product in Latin America and the Caribbean (FDI, 2020)

The essence of “black hole” areas is that they encompass fundamental factors that enable a terrorist group to operate in an environment outside of the control of the law enforcement authorities. Moreover, this phenomenon is emphasised by the TBA. The TBA governments exercise a certain degree of authority, hence they are not failed. Interviews revealed that various initiatives and partnerships have been developed over the years, with the sole aim of increasing the security of the TBA. This is strongly supported by Participant 8, a Brazilian academic, who pointed out that “They [the Tri-Border Area countries] have several institutional mechanisms like the Tripartite Command, the Fusion Centre in Itaipu (COIF), and even simple but effective initiatives like WhatsApp groups”. Participant 21, a Police Commissioner from Brazil, also emphasised that “The Tri-Border Area region is one of the most watched in the country, but there are still flaws”. This represents a direct demonstration of the fact the three governments have control in the area, and conduct various activities to combat the crime-terror nexus, which stresses that they have not yet failed to enforce, to a certain extent, the rule of law.

Nonetheless, these initiatives have been met with scepticism by the majority of participants, who argued that these have been weak and sometimes ineffective due to other fundamental factors that allow the crime-terror nexus to happen in the region. It could be therefore argued that it is not just the weak/failed state that provides incentives for the formation of the crime-terror nexus. It has been emphasised that “each and every country in the Tri-Border Area suffer from inside widespread corruption” (Participant 20, Israeli Academic) and that the geographical attributes of the area make it a difficult place to be controlled, especially since the Lebanese diaspora facilitates Hezbollah’s interests (Participant 15, Brazilian Federal Agent and Participant 5, Policy Analyst). Moreover, there is a “very loose understanding of whose jurisdiction came into play there”, as emphasised by Participant 5, which results in poorly coordinated law enforcement efforts. Hence, it is the confluence of several factors that collude to generate a set of particular conditions attracting a terrorist presence, including the geographic attributes of the area, the diaspora community, and corruption. The findings highlighted that the TBA is “a paradise for wrong people

with wrong ideas" mainly due to these characteristics (Participant 18, an anti-fraud and anti-money laundering specialist, Brazil).

This research argues that whilst the lack of effective state control offers the opportunity for the crime-terror nexus to occur in a given area, the particular characteristics of the area influence a terrorist organisation's decision to engage in a nexus. The premise underlying this hypothesis is that although the absence of government control is a precursor for the existence of a "black hole", it is by no means a satisfactory justification. Therefore, while the absence of government control in an area (but not necessarily the entire state) is an important condition for the emergence of a "black hole", the characteristics of the area determine the probability of the terrorist organisation's presence in that area and its engagement in a crime-terror nexus.

The TBA is difficult to control and requires increased coordination and cooperation between states, as it lies at the intersection of several borders. In the Tri-Border Area, joint security efforts by Argentinian, Brazilian, and Paraguayan security forces indicated some results in countering these illegal activities. Still, obstacles persist, and there is evidence of insufficient action in implementing these policies to counter the crime-terror nexus. As pointed out in the previous chapter by Participant 20, an Israeli academic, governments' efforts are hindered by corruption in their law enforcement apparatuses, faulty criminal justice systems, lack of government agreement on the issue of terrorism, low wages, unsatisfactory training and outdated equipment, and a lack of coordinated efforts.

Despite the efforts to date, participants emphasise that law enforcement institutions are not always willing to cooperate, which is a sign of a lack of effective, constant and homogenised control of the region. Participant 11, a Political Scientist based in the U.S, emphasises in the previous chapter that the TBA countries "do not have a very strong tradition and habit of sharing sensitive information among themselves, of cooperating with other countries on sensitive information." The divide in terms of access in certain areas, on top of the reluctance of some institutions to share information, coupled with high levels of corruption, hinders the effectiveness of any initiatives in the area. Moreover, as explained in the discussion on the "black hole"

literature in Chapter 2, one of the factors necessary for the emergence of a “black hole” area in which the crime-terror nexus can manifest is the existence of a diaspora community. Participants in this study point out that in the TBA, the Middle Eastern community is an important factor, as they provide a rich source of financial and logistical support for Hezbollah. Terrorists and criminals alike are granted freedom of movement and action by the population from which they draw logistic support and refuge. Another important factor is the geographical attributes of the area. The TBA provide Hezbollah with a safe haven, a steady ground from which to organise their operations, as well as a place to develop profitable illegal partnerships with organised criminal groups. Central to this is the lawless nature of the area itself, allowing for substantial freedom of movement due to jurisdiction issues, poor coordination between the law enforcement forces of the three countries, and the presence of the rivers and jungle area that are difficult to monitor. Weak state control over this particular area is a characteristic that enables the crime-terror nexus to flourish. Participants emphasise that this region consists of highly porous borders and poorly governed spaces that enable transnational illegal activities. The region’s geography not only allows for the crime-terror nexus to flourish, but it also increases the intensity of these groups’ control over illicit routes that allows them to attend to the needs of a much broader clientele, including Europe, Africa and the Middle East. The fluidity of the frontiers is a security concern for the three countries as crimes such as drugs and arms trafficking, smuggling, money laundering and other illicit activities are common issues that are difficult to manage and counter.

Another factor is the proliferation of corruption. This is supported by participants’ responses, which highlighted that law enforcement officers “turn a blind eye” and “look the other way” because they can “get in a week what they earn in a year” (Participant 23, an Argentine academic). When recalling his experiences, Participant 6, an Argentine Security Analyst, points out toward the authorities turning a blind eye, mentioning that “I was there I saw the people [criminals] walking free around the Tri-Border Area. I saw the police doing nothing.” Therefore, it can be argued that corruption and terrorism do not only join forces in conflict-torn countries where criminal activities are likely to thrive. In any part of the world where endemic

corruption has made a country or its neighbours vulnerable, terrorist organisations and criminals alike are ready to use this to their benefit. Similar to criminals and those ready to accept and benefit from their enticements, terrorist organisations take advantage of the same grey areas and the penetrability of the legal institutions through corruption in order to secure their operations. Thus, no country is totally immune. As pointed out in the interviews, the TBA countries are perceived as being highly corrupt, as corruption in Argentina and Brazil is seen as “endemic”, while in Paraguay is seen as “systemic”, with a large part of its economy being illicit (Participant 11, a Political Scientist based in the U.S).

Corruption hampers the ability of the government to be just and effectively implement the rule of law. More often than not, several factors come into play when rendering an area outside of government control. For example, in the TBA, the borders are highly porous, corruption is rampant, and local support can be easily achieved. According to the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), all three countries scored as being highly corrupt (See Figure 7.4).

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Figure 7.4: The Tri-Border Area Countries ranking on the Corruption Perception Index (2021)

Similarly, to what Participant 11 emphasised in his interview, Argentina and Brazil share the same rank, while Paraguay scores higher on the Index. These are two relatively strong states, both highly developed and functioning, and one weaker state in terms of corruption. It can be assumed that Paraguay is the weak link in the region, and the least effective state in the area, as explicitly pointed out in the interviews that “Paraguay is the eye of the triple border” (Participant 22, Special Agent with the

Brazilian Federal Police). However, Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay all experience high levels of corruption. Corruption is an endemic problem in all three states, destabilising their societies. Findings revealed the role of corruption in creating state weakness and rendering the TBA states unable to act effectively against the lawlessness in their border area.

Nonetheless, Paraguay plays an essential role in characterising the Tri-Border Area as a “black hole”. Findings revealed that Paraguay is not able to counter the crime-terror nexus. Argentine and Brazil border controls have been somewhat successful in limiting the illegal activities within their border towns, but still encounter difficulties when dealing with the ineffectiveness and corruption of their Paraguayan counterparts. Widespread government corruption and loopholes in domestic policy allow illicit activities to remain unhindered. Citizens rank the police as the second-most corrupt institution in the country (Risk and Compliance Portal, 2020). Over 90 per cent of Paraguay’s police are reportedly corrupt (Counter Extremism Project, 2021). Corrupt politicians also work with drug cartels in the TBA, which in turn offer support to the terrorist groups that operate there (Counter Extremism Project, 2021). Participant 11, a Political Scientist based in the US, pointed out that “the Paraguayan state it’s by large bought to allow crime to thrive”. Corruption remains widespread in Paraguay, with public scandals involving high-level officials (Aljazeera, 2022). This is a major issue of concern, with state officials at all levels not only being extremely corrupt, but also actively partaking in criminal activities, including contraband and drug trafficking.

Institutional weakness, the absence of effective control mechanisms, and the persistence of high levels of impunity are influencing the way in which the crime-terror nexus is dealt with in the TBA. Even though a number of initiatives exist, they are not effectively implemented as a result of the poor political leadership and lack of coordination between the three countries. Moreover, Paraguay’s large porous borders are used by foreign and national criminal organisations to transit in and out of the country, activities that are also facilitated by corrupt border authorities and other law enforcement officials (Global Organized Crime Index, 2021). Nonetheless, corruption is widespread within the security apparatus of the three countries, which lack adequate

funding and training, and these are only some of the obstacles that persist and delay the effectiveness of any initiatives to counter the nexus in the region. Political disagreements between the three governments also impede the coordination of law enforcement efforts. Participant 24, a Captain in the Brazilian Army, emphasised that the TBA countries “are politically very polarised” and “don’t act strategically”. This strongly influences the cooperation between the law enforcement agencies, particularly in terms of strategic intelligence and joint efforts to counter the crime-terror nexus.

This section strongly implies that the TBA can be described as a “black hole”. The results are consistent with Makarenko’s (2004) conceptualisation of a black hole as a space where the absent or ineffective exercise of state governance allows for the crime-terror nexus to develop. However, where past research had found that the “black hole” is represented by a weak or failed state (Kaldor, 2003; Korteweg & Erhardt, 2006), this study has shown that “black holes” can develop anywhere, not necessarily in states characterised by a lack of central authority, lawlessness and insecurity. This research provides supporting evidence that the “black hole” theory is equally applicable in democratic, non-failed states. The TBA consists of three states, with rather large economies and with a central authority that exercises its powers in the region. However, the TBA states have poor-governed territories that provide a “black hole” environment due to a set of characteristics that include geographical attributes, the presence of the Lebanese diaspora, high levels of corruption and political disagreements.

This research, therefore, contributes to a growing body of research by suggesting that the “black hole” is an applicable model for any state, not just a failed state, as long as it provides certain area characteristics that render it suitable for the formation of the crime-terror nexus. It is possible to hypothesise that these conditions are likely to occur in any state, and this contribution raises a variety of enthralling areas for future study.

7.2 Necessity versus Opportunity: Criminal Entrepreneurship

This section aims to revisit the existing literature and apply some of the findings to further the current understanding of how state-sponsored terrorist organisations can generate profits. The possibility that state sponsorship could ever coexist with criminality is often disregarded, as it is argued that the ideological motivations of terrorist organisations conflict with the engagement in criminal activities (Reitano, Clarke & Adal, 2017). Hence, the existing literature regards the use of criminal activities as an alternative to state sponsorship (See Chapter Two). However, this oversimplification neglects the importance of criminal entrepreneurship, which has been identified in this thesis as a significant factor in Hezbollah's activities in the TBA. This side of entrepreneurship is an emerging field in need of further research from different perspectives (Beaver & Jennings, 2005). Although the concept of entrepreneurship has been previously associated with terrorism (Krželj-Čolović & Mazić, 2017; Abukadirov, 2010), this section brings a contribution to the existing literature by looking at the rationale behind and the factors that influence criminal entrepreneurship for state-sponsored terrorist organisations. This chapter discovers and identifies key issues for criminal entrepreneurship in black hole areas from a necessity versus opportunity perspective. It argues that the necessity to engage in criminal activities rises from a lack of state sponsorship, while the opportunity to do so is provided by the "black hole" environment (See Figure 7.5)

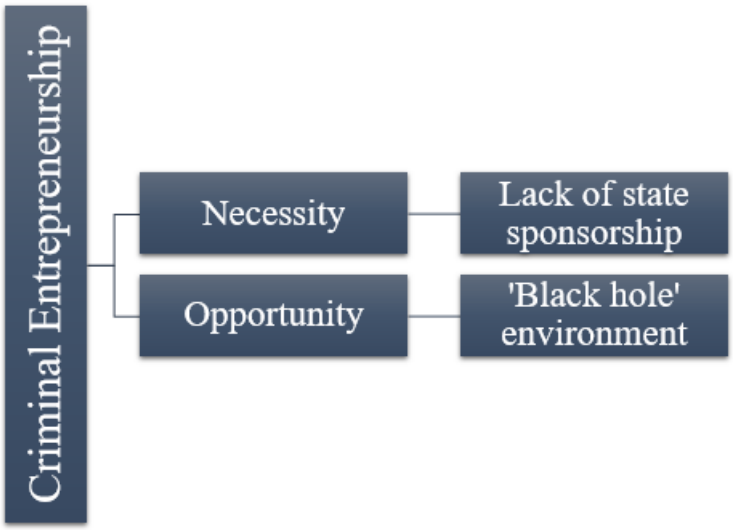

Figure 7.5: Criminal Entrepreneurship motivations (Author's own representation)

The concept of criminal entrepreneurship has been the subject of debate in academia, and it has still to be developed theoretically and conceptually to make it of utility in practical terms (Gottschalk, 2010; Arnuf & Gottschalk, 2012; Gutierrez, 2021). It is a problematic paradigm given that the scholarly community have yet to successfully define the term per se. Gottschalk and Smith (2011, p.2) define the legal entrepreneur as “a person who operates a new enterprise or venture and assumes some accountability for the inherent risk”. Similarly, the criminal entrepreneur aims to discover and exploit opportunities, aiming at situations from which a profit can be generated (Gottschalk & Smith, 2011). The majority of the theoretical work on the crime-terror nexus focuses on the impression of economic needs being the main motivator of terrorist organisations. There is a general agreement within the literature on the crime-terror nexus presented in Chapter Two that the reason for engaging in criminal activities to generate funds has amplified in response to the decline in state sponsorship - a necessity to maintain an alternative and steady source of funding (Dishman 2001; Makarenko, 2004; Shelley 2014; Hutchinson & O’Malley 2007). Terrorist organisations need money to function. When they lack alternative funding, necessity dictates to engage in criminal activities and create partnerships that will provide opportunities for the generation of funds.

In Hezbollah's case, terrorists turn to crime to generate funding and acquire logistical support from criminals due to the international community's successes in attacking other sources of their funding. The lack of state sponsorship over the years provides an incentive for the exploitation of other opportunities, such as organised crime. Regarded as a "safety net for a rainy day" (Participant 20), Hezbollah's engagement in criminal activities is partially dictated by necessity, as the state sponsorship provided by the Islamic Republic of Iran has fluctuated over the years. Participant 11 pointed out that "Iran, being under sanctions, was either not able to meet those growing costs, or couldn't be depended upon in sort of a steady fashion - Certainly, I think it influenced Hezbollah's increased reliance on outside sources". However, Hezbollah's involvement in organised crime is more than a simple response to the decline in state sponsorship. The organisation aims to generate profits by exploiting the opportunities provided by the TBA, as Participant 22, a Special Agent with the Brazilian Federal Police, also believes that "very simply speaking […] appetite grows by eating".

The literature on economic entrepreneurship suggests that necessity entrepreneurs are individuals who start businesses because they cannot find a job that provides a stable income. In contrast, opportunity entrepreneurs are people who leave employment to pursue even more profitable careers as entrepreneurs (Fairlie & Fossen, 2018). When applying this to Hezbollah's case, the lack of state sponsorship implies their necessity to engage in criminal partnerships as "Iran is starting to back away from Hezbollah" (Participant 14, US academic). Participant 24, a Captain in the Brazilian Army, believes that "the sponsorship from Iran is powerful when it comes to international networks and political advantages that Iran can put into place", which implies that the Iranian support is necessary for shielding Hezbollah from international actions. This can be clearly observed in the case of Project Cassandra, detailed in the Context Chapter.

Nonetheless, participants have emphasised that over the years, the financial support from the state sponsor has declined due to the economic turmoil that Iran had been going through. Participant 25, a Lebanese Law Enforcement officer, pointed out that "Hezbollah has thrived for decades on funding from Iran. However, Iran had been

going through devastating sanctions and their ability to finance Hezbollah has dropped. And that's why, I guess, they have to adopt other fund-generating measures, and that is getting involved in organised crime." Hence, due to the lack of stable income, Hezbollah must generate funding elsewhere because "it's not like they have like an interminable source of funds there" (Participant 5, a Policy Analyst at RAND Corporation). Within this context, developing independent fundraising capabilities through criminal activities is a sensible strategic decision that diversifies against a lack of consistent funding.

This thesis argues that criminal opportunity arises in the TBA due to the "black hole" environment. Poorly policed border areas create conditions that help foster criminal partnerships and allow criminal networks to run smoothly. The TBA offers plenty of opportunities for the nexus to occur, which is exploited by terrorist and organised crime groups who successfully create fruitful partnerships in an area that is poorly regulated, easily corrupted and in which criminal activities an easy way to acquire large amounts of money. Thus, it could be argued that Hezbollah can be regarded as an opportunistic criminal entrepreneur, taking advantage of the opportunities that the TBA offers: the confluence of three separate jurisdictions, weak border controls and well-established smuggling routes that they can capitalise on.

Participant 11, a Political Scientist based in the US, pointed out that "the more they [Hezbollah] got involved, the more they saw the opportunity to actually make more money". Hezbollah's engagement in criminal activities is motivated by the opportunity to exploit illegal avenues that generate substantial funds. With the TBA being described as "the centre of a multi-billion-dollar illicit goods trade" by the US Department of State (2019), it is not surprising that this "gives to the organization much more money than is available in Iran." (Participant 24, a Captain in the Brazilian Army).

The connection with local criminal groups is significant as it facilitates the formation of the crime-terror nexus. A terrorist strategy consists of developing cooperative relationships with illegal groups to increase material profits or to exploit new fundraising sources. Participant 2, a US researcher, stressed that "that's why they've joined with the local criminality, because the local criminality, they're there all

the time. And their income is always coming. Whereas if Hezbollah, if they don't get the money from Iran, they can just get it from the local crime scene". According to Makarenko (2002, 2004), criminal groups and terrorists are frequently engaged in strategic alliances in order to secure access to certain illegal goods and services, without being discovered by law enforcement authorities. In a crime-terror nexus case, these interdependencies between terrorists and criminal organisations lead to the formation of profitable economic arrangements that ensure domestic and international trade (Mincheva & Gurr, 2007). This can be observed in the TBA, where rampant illegal activities, high levels of corruption, and the uncontrolled movement of people and goods have facilitated the creation of profitable economic structures from which criminals and terrorists can profit. Commodities exchanges among the three cities result in the area becoming a hub for active transactions involving money, goods, and people, as criminals and terrorists alike take advantage of the TBA's illegal economy. Hence, it seems rational for Hezbollah to engage in organised crime in this "black hole" environment. Shelley (2014, p. 176) argues that terrorists can be regarded as "rational businessmen" who want to "maximize their advantages in different environments". This idea is further supported by Participant 20, an Israeli academic, who emphasised that "Hezbollah already understood [this] and realized that they had created a smart mechanism that produces a lot of money for them". State weakness, due inefficient enforcement of the rule of law, lowers the costs of terror–crime interaction, while heavy corruption and support from the diaspora actively empowers such partnerships between organised crime and terrorism. As parts of the state become criminalised and corrupt, they enable crime-terror networks as profit-seeking relationships form between government officials, terrorists and criminals. Opportunities for criminal activities are sustained by weak law enforcement, corruption and already established criminal networks that Hezbollah capitalises on with the help of the Lebanese diaspora. This is highlighted by Participant 7, a Brazilian academic, who pointed out that:

> You have, for example, a lot of guys connected to PCC, who are sort of freelancing to Hezbollah right now. So it's easier, it's way more interesting to do this kind of activities, if you don't have to create from

> zero, you're using already established network of illegal activities, the bribing from policemen from Brazil, or Argentina, Paraguay, there is already a structure maintaining, that you can enjoy and you can use it.

The findings indicate that the TBA provides ample opportunities to exploit diversified criminal markets, which is one of the reasons Hezbollah decided to explore this avenue. Furthermore, depending on the circumstances, terrorist groups such as Hezbollah might or might not establish operational partnerships with criminal groups and cooperate to carry out particular criminal activities. Logistics and material support are essential elements for terrorist activities. Being able to financially sustain their activates is important for a terrorist organisation to succeed. In this sense, drug trafficking is the most valuable crime activity that convergences terrorists with organised criminal groups as it is highly profitable. It is therefore likely that such connections exist between terrorist organisations and organised criminal groups. Interview data highlighted that in the TBA, drug trafficking is the most obvious area for convergence of Hezbollah with Primeiro Comando da Capital, whom, according to Participant 22, a Special Agent with the Brazilian Federal Police, “are very present in the triple border. And they might be in charge.” The PCC deemed by many the largest and most dangerous criminal organisation on the continent, presents a unique case that deserves closer investigation (Souza & Cavalcanti, 2017; Vargas, 2018). With its presence in not only all South American countries but also other continents, the link with PCC is an important element in assessing Hezbollah’s criminal entrepreneurship. Hezbollah’s involvement in a crime-terror nexus opens up an opportunity to expand its funding network, where in a partnership with PCC, Hezbollah acts as a logistical distributor that enables drug trade abroad, from which high profits can be made. This is mainly due to the fact that “PCC has inside connections [...] Everything PCC has when it comes to information, Hezbollah indirectly has as well, because they share their intelligence. PCC has a very strong, professional and well-structured intelligence cell with worldwide connections.” (Participant 24, a Captain in the Brazilian Army). Hence, it could conceivably be hypothesised that Hezbollah takes advantage of this connection and capitalises on the opportunity to expand its network of criminal activities, which generates considerable revenues, particularly from the international

drug trade and money laundering into what has been described as a “global criminal syndicate” (Participant 6, Argentine Security Analyst).

Although some interview responses show that the link between Hezbollah and PCC is not entirely acknowledged by academics or law enforcement because “nobody can say it officially, it's something currently under investigation” (Participant 6, Argentine Security Analyst), the majority of participants clearly emphasise the importance of this connection and its implication on the crime-terror nexus. It may be the case, therefore, that these variations occur due to the secrecy that characterises their illegal activities. Participant 21, a Police Commissioner in Brazil, points out that although their intelligence team did not identify strong links between PCC and Hezbollah, “it is unlikely that there is no link between the various criminal organisations involved”. Hezbollah’s partnership with PCC opens up an opportunity for Hezbollah to act outside Lebanon, and in a partnership with PCC, Hezbollah acts as a logistical distributor that enables drug trade abroad, from which high profits can be made that, can substitute the lack of state sponsorship (Desideri, 2019). This reflects not only a response to shortfalls in state sponsorship but also Hezbollah’s tendency to expand its criminal networks and the aspiration to develop financial independence, which indicates a more complex relationship between state sponsorship and crime than one based on merely necessity. As evidenced in the interviews, Hezbollah’s decision to engage in organised crime “was not either a conscious decision or one dictated by necessity, it was also dictated by expediency, opportunities, just random circumstances” (Participant 11, a Political Scientist based in the US).

These findings raise intriguing questions regarding the nature and extent of criminal entrepreneurship relevant to state-sponsored terrorist groups, and Hezbollah in particular. This study argues against the widely held assumption that state sponsorship and crime are antagonistic and suggests that the explanation for the engagement of a state-sponsored terrorist organisation in criminal activities is partially motivated by necessity, but it also lies in the structure of opportunities provided by a “black hole” environment. The results of this research provide supporting evidence that the “black hole” environment provides aspects of an opportunity structure that facilitates and enables the crime-terror nexus.

7.3 Summary

This chapter is centrally informed by Makarenko's (2004) conceptualisation of the crime-terror nexus, particularly the "black hole" theory. Drawing from the discussion above, the present results are significant in at least two major respects. The first is that a "black hole" can occur anywhere, contrary to widely held views that the state must be weak or fragile. This study presents findings indicating that certain attributes contribute to a "black hole" emergence. More specifically, the following characteristics can be observed in the TBA:

- The geographical attributes of the area, particularly the jungle area, the presence of rivers and the close airport connections.
- The poorly regulated environment of the TBA due to ineffective exercise of state control
- The presence of the diaspora that provides a haven for Hezbollah.
- The prevalence of corruption in the three countries.

These findings have important implications for understanding how these "black holes" can occur outside of failed states and the factors that prompt the formation of the crime-terror nexus. This study argues that a "black area" can form in an area, which is:

1) Characterised by geography that provides a permissive environment for criminal activities;
2) Where a diaspora community is present and whose background coincides with that of a terrorist organisation;
3) Under the control of a government (or multiple governments) characterised by corruption and ineffective exercise of state control.

This is not to say that all areas that fall into this classification are a "black hole", but they should nonetheless warrant the international community's attention.

The second result of this study is that the concept of criminal entrepreneurship can be used to discuss the potential drivers of criminality behind a state-sponsored

terrorist organisation. Findings indicate that while a focus on economic necessity provides an important perspective due to loss of funding, terrorist groups' choices are also heavily influenced by the opportunities available to them. These opportunities are largely created by the “black hole” environment, which allows terrorist organisations to exploit these areas and engage in organised criminal activities, as well as criminal partnerships, as seen in the case of Hezbollah and PCC. These findings have important implications for developing an understanding of the drivers of criminality behind Hezbollah and share light on how the crime-terror nexus is counteracted in the region. The results of this study indicate that although initiatives exist to fight the crime-terror nexus, they are by no means sufficient and most times, they are not efficient due to the “black hole” environment in which these organisations operate.

The next chapter provides the conclusion derived from this thesis’s findings, a summary of this research, implications for professionals and its contribution to knowledge.

CHAPTER 8: Conclusion

This chapter sets out the conclusion of this thesis and its resultant contribution, including key outcomes of the research in furthering our knowledge of the crime-terror nexus and developing an understanding of the motivations of state-sponsored terrorist organisations to engage in the crime-terror nexus. The conclusions of this study are based on the findings revealed from data analysis, which was discussed in Chapters 6 and 7.

8.1 Thesis Summary

This study has set out to gain a better understanding of the crime-terror nexus concerning state-sponsored terrorist organisations. Such an enquiry had become necessary because, as alluded to in the introductory chapters of this study and demonstrated throughout, the crime-terror nexus has taken a strong international character. This research contextualises terrorism in Chapter Two, with particular emphasis placed on state-sponsored terrorism and its characteristics. This is necessary in order to understand the evolution of terrorism, and specifically of state-sponsored terrorism and its characteristics. In Chapter Three, it was imperative to examine the current literature on organised crime, and how the trajectories of terrorism and organised crime converge. Extensive literature was consulted to provide a background to the relationship between terrorism and organised crime, which highlights the complexity of this relationship between the two phenomena. Having examined the crime-terror nexus and focusing on the spectres of interaction between terrorism and organised crime, the research introduces its case study, Hezbollah, as an example of a state-sponsored organisation that engages in organised crime despite receiving state support. This represents the basis on which this research was conducted, seeking to respond to several research questions related to the motivations behind Hezbollah's involvement in organised crime, the activities it engages in, and how effectively the crime-terror nexus is countered.

Specifically, the purpose of this study is to understand and examine the factors that have led to the convergence of organised criminal groups and state-sponsored

terrorist organisations. This analysis concentrates on Hezbollah's activities in Latin America and addresses the issue of the crime-terror nexus that occurs in the Tri-Border Area (TBA) – Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay. This study is a qualitative study, where the researcher adopts a case study approach to achieve its objectives. Due to the limitations posed by the COVID-19 global pandemic, semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted with 25 participants via online platforms and via email. While recognising the limitations of the analysis as presented in Chapter Four (including a small sample of 25 participants; also a single case study, which perhaps limits to a certain extent the generalisability of the findings), the initially stated primary aim of this research is successfully achieved throughout this project.

Chapter Five sets the scene for this research. It introduces the Tri-Border area as the environment in which Hezbollah operates, placing particular emphasis on the characteristics of the area, Hezbollah's operations, and it also provides an overview of initiatives designed to counter the crime-terror nexus in that region. This ensures that the research is grounded in the contemporary politics of the TBA between Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay, but also within the larger area of Latin American security studies.

The findings of this study are presented in Chapter Six. These are consistent with previous research on the crime-terror nexus, which suggests that terrorist organisations and organised criminal groups regularly engage in mutually beneficial strategic partnerships. However, when investigating the potential drivers of criminality that lie behind such partnerships (RQ2[4]), this study identifies the concept of criminal entrepreneurship as a useful tool to explain how state-sponsored terrorist organisations make a conscious, rational decision to build strategic partnerships with organised criminal groups, in a particular area such as the TBA. The results of this study indicate that this decision is motivated by both necessities due to lack of state sponsorship and the opportunity provided by the environment in which they decide to establish these partnerships. A lack of sufficient state sponsorship forces the terrorist organisation, to a certain extent, to seek other sources of financial stability and

[4] What are the potential drivers of criminality behind Hezbollah's involvement in organised crime in the TBA?

security, prompting them to take advantage of the institutionally vulnerable situation by infiltrating the largest territories possible, seeking lucrative profits. In this case, involvement in organised crime is regarded as a 'safety net'.

On the other hand, even though a source of funding exists (such as in the case of Iran – Hezbollah), one cannot ignore the fact that the decision to engage in a crime-terror nexus is also based on opportunity. This research demonstrates that the TBA allows Hezbollah to capitalise on regional criminal networks, exploiting gaps for criminal gains and engaging in a wide range of criminal activities (RQ3[5]). Findings indicate that the group sources funds through a wide range of activities, including tax evasion, money laundering, weapons trafficking, cigarette smuggling, and most importantly, drug trafficking, an illegal activity which was particularly emphasised in this study.

Chapter Seven provides a discussion of the findings. As this research progressed, the findings are, to some extent, at odds with those presented in the existing literature. One of the main concepts from the literature applied to this study is that of the "black holes" theory. This concept has proved to be a useful one in providing an understanding of the factors that influence the formation of the crime-terror nexus in the TBA between Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay (RQ1[6]). More specifically, this study shows that the "black hole area" concept is not specific to failed states; it emphasises some of the vulnerabilities of a particular area that incline terrorist and criminal groups to converge, regardless of the level of state weakness or failure. This research suggests that the TBA can be described as a "black hole" despite non-state failure, efficient law enforcement systems and clear counter initiatives to combat this issue, as presented in the discussion chapter. Drawing from the discussion presented in previous chapters, after examining the intricacies and interrelations of the findings, this study reports the significant characteristics, which identify the TBA as a "black hole", along with the factors that appear to prompt the formation of the crime-terror nexus. The ideal geographical situation, lack of effective authority, the ineffective rule of law, corruption and porous borders, and the presence of a diaspora, provide an

[5] What organised criminal activities does Hezbollah engage in, in the TBA?
[6] What factors appear to prompt the formation of the crime-terror nexus in the TBA?

ideal “safe haven” for the development of the crime-terror nexus. In these conditions, terrorist organisations such as Hezbollah can capitalise on criminal networks in the region, and build fruitful partnerships with organised criminal groups. Evidence from the study confirms the relationship between Hezbollah and Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC). Hence, the “black hole” environment provides the ideal opportunity for terrorist organisations to engage in and maintain a successful crime-terror nexus.

When looking at the initiatives designed to tackle the crime-terror nexus in the TBA (RQ4[7]), data has shown that although some initiatives exist, they are met with scepticism and are generally ineffective due to the factors mentioned above that characterise the area as a “black hole”. Their ineffectiveness is due to obstacles such as corruption, jurisdiction issues, and lack of cooperation and resources, as presented in Chapter Six. Hence, understanding these vulnerabilities would allow for identifying possible areas where the crime-terror nexus could potentially develop and for preventive countermeasures to the convergence of these groups. One should be reminded, however, that effective responses should be tailored to address these threats in specific contexts.

8.2 Contribution to knowledge

This research contributes to two fields of literature: the crime-terror nexus concerning state-sponsored terrorist organisations, including a re-examination of the “black hole theory”, and the concept of “criminal entrepreneurship” by identifying an area in which these issues overlap.

First, this research addresses one key assumption in the literature, broadening the narrative surrounding the “black hole theory” and putting forward a hypothesis of its existence outside of weak or failed states. The contemporary relevance of the study is highlighted through the example of Hezbollah in the TBA. Drawing on Makarenko’s (2004) crime-terror nexus theory, the research findings assisted in the development of a re-examination of the black hole syndrome and its characteristics, demonstrating

[7] What are the key informants’ perceptions of the initiatives designed to tackle the crime-terror nexus in the TBA?

that a black hole can develop and sustain the crime-terror nexus regardless of the state-level failure. The analysis shows some of the conditions of territories that render it attractive for the formation of crime-terror nexus, such as ideal geographical location, lack of authority, the ineffective application of rule of law, corruption of law enforcement officials, porous and ungoverned borders, as well as political disagreements. This facilitates the early identification of areas of risk of becoming black holes. This study offers evidence that a black hole can occur anywhere as long as the aforementioned factors characterise the region. This research should be seen as paving the way for future research efforts into a potential framework for identification of possible “black hole” areas where the crime-terror nexus can develop.

Second, the case study examines the activities of Hezbollah in the TBA of Latin America. Although they had been subjected to the previous analysis, they have not specifically addressed the issues as to why a state-sponsored terrorist organisation conducts illicit activities in that particular area. In doing so, this research provides an examination of the factors that influence the decision of a state-sponsored terrorist organisation to engage in criminal activities due to both necessity and opportunity. This study introduces the concept of “criminal entrepreneurship” as a useful tool for understanding the economic rationalities of state-sponsored terrorist groups based on the structural opportunities offered by the “black hole” environment, expanding the scope of the state-sponsored terrorist organisation’s considerations of profit beyond a simple necessity. This study argues that through the concept of “criminal entrepreneurship”, state-sponsored terrorist organisations have the ability to establish new ways in which to acquire funds outside of their state-sponsor. In this case, the criminal entrepreneurship refers to Hezbollah’s participation in illicit economic activities by creating partnerships with organised criminal groups such as the PCC and handling illegal goods and services, such as drug trafficking. The opportunities offered by a black hole area can result in the desire of a state-sponsored terrorist organisation to engage in lucrative criminal activities in that area, engaging in the process of developing new criminal partnerships, and running illegal activities aimed to generate profit.

It is important to stress that this study focused solely on a state-sponsored terrorist organisation; nonetheless, the findings of this research can be applied to any terrorist organisation in similar contexts. This study forms the basis of further research into how terrorist organisations, whether state-sponsored or not, operate in "black hole" areas to maximise their profits by creating criminal partnerships and engaging in organised crime. The study's conceptual discussions and empirical results capture the way in which the crime-terror nexus occurs and the motivations behind such interactions. What emerges in this study is a new picture of "black hole" areas, as this study has no doubt thrown some illumination on the fact that these do not only occur in failed states but also in functioning, democratic states that have poorly governed territories that can provide a "black hole" environment. By focusing on the TBA between Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay, this research deepens knowledge of Latin American security issues. The geographic specialism is outlined throughout this thesis, with particular emphasis in Chapter 5, where the context of the TBA is introduced. By analysing a wide range of interviews with local and regional actors, this study brings to light a contemporary challenge, and it sets an agenda for future research and debate by pointing out that Latin America is more than ever confronted with transnational threats and security challenges, particularly the crime-terror nexus. This study offers a contribution to better understanding Latin American security issues and broadened the understanding of transnational terrorism threats in this part of the world.

This thesis concludes with the general argument that the motivational factors behind a terrorist organisation's involvement in organised crime do not lie only in the necessity to acquire funds, but also in the opportunity that is provided by the "black hole" environment. As clearly expressed in this thesis, factors beyond economic necessity play an essential role in defining Hezbollah's relationship to crime. Criminal entrepreneurship plays a vital role in understanding the motivations behind Hezbollah's involvement in a crime-terror nexus, as their desire to acquire funds outside of their state-sponsor guides their partnerships with organised criminal groups. The "black hole" environment provides opportunities for criminal entrepreneurship and specific opportunity structures that allow terror-crime associations to form. As

Participant 16 summarises, the crime-terror nexus “started as an opportunity that has taken hold to stay definitively”.

8.3 Implications for Professionals

The case study of this thesis highlights the deep linkages between organised crime and terrorism. To meet the challenge of this increasingly complex and changing threat environment in the TBA, better cross-agency communication and cooperation can contribute to the fight against the crime-terror nexus. At an operational level, the TBA countries must ensure that anti-crime agencies and counter-terrorism units engage and cooperate in order to identify and monitor the emerging connections between organised crime and terrorism.

It is therefore essential that the agencies involved in countering the crime-terror nexus are trained in how to identify the existing and emerging linkages between organised criminal groups and terrorist organisations, constantly monitoring new developments in the TBA, and sharing information between agencies and governments. Nonetheless, it was acknowledged in this thesis that any work aimed at targeting the convergence between organised crime and terrorism is hindered by political and diplomatic disagreements that affect how the crime-terror nexus is regarded by law enforcement agencies. Therefore, the TBA countries need to establish a unified approach towards countering the crime-terror nexus and working together to implement adequate policies designed to effectively counter this phenomenon.

Given the continuous challenges that the TBA encounters regarding border control, it is essential to improve the co-operation channels amongst all the national border control agencies in the region. As this thesis emphasises, particular significance must be given to what are considered to be porous areas within the security structure on the TBA countries, as these are areas where the crime-terror nexus develops and flourishes rapidly. This must incorporate the entire range of law enforcement agencies operating in the region, as well as diplomatic efforts. Joint training operations between national agencies are important as a potential avenue to combine security actors from across borders. It is crucial to understand that any

effective operation against the actors involved in the crime-terror nexus depends on an integrated approach involving all stakeholders in the TBA.

8.4 Areas for Future Research

There are several gaps in this thesis that would benefit from future research. In particular, it must be emphasised that this research focuses on one geographic area –the TBA - and one single case study – Hezbollah. This research is an example of a single-case research design that resulted in outcomes, which provide broader implications to similar contexts outside the case. This study emphasises not only the dynamic interactions between organised crime and terrorism but also how these groups produce a complex security landscape in border areas. This thesis serves as a template by which the potential for a more accurate assessment of the crime-terror nexus and its development can be predicted. Further research could examine the existence of “black hole” areas in other sides of the world, particularly borderlands, and how the crime-terror nexus can develop there. Further research can examine additional factors that congregate to form a “black hole” and expand the framework presented in this study.

Additionally, this thesis examined the nature of economic rationalities of state-sponsored terrorist groups and the opportunities offered by the “black hole” environments in which the crime-terror nexus occurs. Further research can be conducted into other state-sponsored terrorist groups, their methods, and their models of entrepreneurship. It is important to note that the same rationalisations presented in this study can be applied to evaluate the concept of “criminal entrepreneurship” in relation to any terrorist organisation, state-sponsored or not. This will offer valuable insight into the decision-making of terrorist organisations, what motivates their decision to engage in organised crime and how this stands in relation to their original objectives. Moreover, a second research avenue could examine the involvement of organised criminal groups in a crime-terror nexus, the potential advantages and disadvantages of engaging in a nexus with a terrorist organisation and how these affect their partnerships.

It is important to emphasise that this thesis was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic and only benefits from the input of twenty-five participants involved in academia and law enforcement. Interviews were conducted online, and although they provide valuable insight into the phenomenon, further research in the field with local communities is needed, building on the positive work undertaken in this study. This research also acknowledges the need to gather the views of the primary actors involved in the crime-terror nexus and an outline of potential research methods to achieve this. Although methodologically challenging, it would be instrumental to conduct some studies, which seek to explore the views of those involved first-hand in the crime-terror nexus and to capture their experiences and perspectives qualitatively.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 – Interview Guide

1. In your professional context, how have you come across Hezbollah in the TBA? Can you tell me a bit more about your professional experience?

2. Based on your experience, what kind of criminal activities do Hezbollah engage in? Are they profitable?

3. Why do you think the TBA is "attractive" for Hezbollah?

4. In your opinion, what enables and sustains the crime-terror nexus in the TBA?

5. What do you think are the potential drivers of criminality behind Hezbollah's involvement in organised crime? Do you believe that the lack of state sponsorship influenced Hezbollah's trajectory along a criminal pathway?

6. Could Hezbollah's use of criminal activities as a financial resource indicate a drive toward self-sufficiency?

7. What initiatives exist to tackle this phenomenon in the TBA?

8. Do you think that these initiatives are sufficient and effective to tackle the crime-terror nexus in the TBA?

APPENDIX 2 – Introductory letter

Coventry University

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Adriana Marin, a PhD Student at the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University, United Kingdom. I am currently undertaking a research project as part of my doctoral studies under the supervision of Professor David McIlhatton, Professor Rachel Monaghan and Doctor David Curran. This research project aims to evaluate the crime-terror nexus in the Tri-Border Area of Latin America, with a particular focus on the state-sponsored terrorist organisation Hezbollah.

I would like to invite you to participate in this research project. This would involve you participating in an online semi-structured interview, consisting of 6 open-ended questions related to the crime-terror nexus in relation to Hezbollah in the Tri-Border Area, with other questions emerging from the dialogue,

It is expected that the interview will take about 45 minutes to complete and it will be audio recorded to help me analyse the data provided. A participant information sheet and an informed consent form will be emailed to you should you agree to participate in this research.

If you consent to participate, your responses will be kept confidential. The information provided will be used solely for the purpose of this research project. No persons other than my supervisors and I will have access to the information you provide. Your participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw consent at any time and to withdraw any unprocessed data you have previously supplied. Upon completion of the research, all interviews will be securely stored on encrypted devices.

If you have any questions regarding this project, feel free to contact me on +44 07939826309 or at marina@uni.coventry.ac.uk. This project has received clearance by the Coventry University Research Ethics Committee. Should you have any concerns regarding the conduct of this research project, you are welcome to contact

the Chair of Ethics Committee/Deputy Ethics Lead at the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Dr. Esra Kaytaz at ethics.ctpsr@coventry.ac.uk.

We greatly value your co-operation. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Kindest regards,

Adriana Marin

PhD Candidate

Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations

Coventry University

APPENDIX 3 – Participant Information Sheet

The Convergence of Terrorism and Organised Crime: An Examination of Hezbollah's Activities in Latin America from a Crime-Terror Nexus Perspective

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

You are being invited to take part in research on **the crime-terror nexus in the Tri-Border Area of Latin America**. **Adriana Marin, PhD Student, Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations** at Coventry University is leading this research. Before you decide to take part it is important you understand why the research is being conducted and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

What is the purpose of the study?

This study is concerned with the convergence of terrorism and organised crime, placing particular focus on Hezbollah in the TBA. The objectives of this study are as follows:

5. To understand and critically assess the factors that drive the crime-terror nexus in relation to state-sponsored terrorist organisations
6. To investigate the specificities of Hezbollah and how their activities have potentially developed as a consequence of state-sponsorship
7. To explore the decision-making process behind Hezbollah's operations in the Tri-Border Area (TBA), assess the impact of their operations, and understand how these impact on policymaking
8. To assess the impact of the crime-terror nexus as well as the effectiveness of the strategies used to combat this issue.

Why have I been chosen to take part?

You are invited to participate in this study because you **will have knowledge about this particular topic**.

What are the benefits of taking part?

By sharing your experiences with us, you will be helping **Adriana Marin** and Coventry University to **better understand the crime-terror nexus in relation to state-sponsored terrorist organisations.**

Are there any risks associated with taking part?

This study has been reviewed and approved through Coventry University's formal research ethics procedure. There are no significant risks associated with participation.

Do I have to take part?

No – it is entirely up to you. If you do decide to take part, please keep this Information Sheet and complete the Informed Consent Form to show that you understand your rights in relation to the research and that you are happy to participate. Please note down your participant number (which is on the Consent Form) and provide this to the lead researcher if you seek to withdraw from the study at a later date. You are free to withdraw your information from the project data set at any time until the data are fully anonymised in our records on 01/09/2021. You should note that your data may be used in the production of formal research outputs (e.g. journal articles, conference papers, theses and reports) prior to this date and so you are advised to contact the university at the earliest opportunity should you wish to withdraw from the study. To withdraw, please contact the lead researcher (contact details are provided below). Please also contact the Research Support Office email **info.ctpsr@coventry.ac.uk** so that your request can be dealt with promptly in the event of the lead researcher's absence. You do not need to give a reason. A decision to withdraw, or not to take part, will not affect you in any way.

What will happen if I decide to take part?

You will be asked a number of questions regarding **the crime-terror nexus in relation to state-sponsored terrorist organisations, particularly Hezbollah's activities in the Tri-Border Area**. The interview will take place online at a time that is convenient to you. Ideally, we would like to audio record your responses (and will require your consent for this), so the location should be in a fairly quiet area. The interview should take around **45 minutes** to complete.

Data Protection and Confidentiality

Your data will be processed in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation 2016 (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018. All information collected about you will be kept strictly confidential. Unless they are fully anonymised in our records, your data will be referred to by a unique participant number rather than by name. If you consent to being audio recorded, all recordings will be destroyed once they have been transcribed. Your data will only be viewed by the researcher/research team. All electronic data will be stored on a password-protected computer file **provided by Coventry University**. All paper records will be stored in a locked filing cabinet at the **Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University.** Your consent information will be kept separately from your responses in order to minimise risk in the event of a data breach. The lead researcher will take responsibility for data destruction and all collected data will be destroyed on or before **20/12/2025**.

Data Protection Rights

Coventry University is a Data Controller for the information you provide. You have the right to access information held about you. Your right of access can be exercised in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018. You also have other rights including rights of correction, erasure, objection, and data portability. For more details, including the right to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office, please visit www.ico.org.uk. Questions, comments and requests about your personal data can also be sent to the University Data Protection Officer - enquiry.igu@coventry.ac.uk

What will happen with the results of this study?

The results of this study may be summarised in published articles, reports and presentations. Quotes or key findings will always be made anonymous in any formal outputs unless we have your prior and explicit written permission to attribute them to you by name.

Making a Complaint

If you are unhappy with any aspect of this research, please first contact the lead researcher, **Adriana Marin, at marina@uni.coventry.ac.uk or by telephone at +4407939826309**. If you still have concerns and wish to make a formal complaint, please write to:

Dr Bahar Baser

Ethics Lead – Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations

Email Address: ab8225@coventry.ac.uk

In your letter please provide information about the research project, specify the name of the researcher and detail the nature of your complaint.

APPENDIX 4 – Informed Consent Form

Participant No.

INFORMED CONSENT FORM:

The Convergence of Terrorism and Organised Crime: An Examination of Hezbollah's Activities in Latin America from a Crime-Terror Nexus Perspective

You are invited to take part in this research study for the purpose of collecting data on ***the convergence of terrorism and organised crime, placing particular focus on Hezbollah in the Tri Border Area.***

Before you decide to take part, you must **read the accompanying Participant Information Sheet.**

Please do not hesitate to ask questions if anything is unclear or if you would like more information about any aspect of this research. It is important that you feel able to take the necessary time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

If you are happy to participate, please confirm your consent by circling YES against each of the below statements and then signing and dating the form as a participant.

1	**I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions**	**YES**	**NO**
2	**I understand my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my data, without giving a reason, by contacting the lead researcher and the Research Support Office at any time until the date specified in the Participant Information Sheet**	**YES**	**NO**
3	**I have noted down my participant number (top left of this Consent Form) which may be required by the lead researcher if I wish to withdraw from the study**	**YES**	**NO**
4	**I understand that all the information I provide will be held securely and treated confidentially**	**YES**	**NO**
5	**I am happy for the information I provide to be used (anonymously) in academic papers and other formal research outputs**	**YES**	**NO**
6	**I am happy for the interview to be audio recorded**	**YES**	**NO**
7	**I agree to take part in the above study**	**YES**	**NO**

Thank you for your participation in this study. Your help is very much appreciated.

Participant's Name	Date	Signature
Researcher	**Date**	**Signature**

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