

Executive Summary

Links between Terrorism and Migration:

An Exploration

This Research Paper explores and questions some assumed causal links between terrorism on the one hand and (forced and irregular) migration on the other. The paper delves into the role that state and non-state terrorism might have in causing migration as well as analysing if and how refugees' camps and the diaspora community might be a target for radicalisation. One of the findings of the paper is how migration control for the control of terrorism is a widely used instrument however, it might hurt *bona fide* migrants and legal foreign residents more than *mala fide* terrorists. Finally, this Research Paper offers recommendations that can go some way towards disentangling the issues of (refugee) migration and terrorism.

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About the Author

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About ICCT

The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague (ICCT) is an independent think and do tank providing multidisciplinary policy advice and practical, solution-oriented implementation support on prevention and the rule of law, two vital pillars of effective counter-terrorism. ICCT's work focuses on themes at the intersection of countering violent extremism and criminal justice sector responses, as well as human rights related aspects of counter-terrorism. The major project areas concern countering violent extremism, rule of law, foreign fighters, country and regional analysis, rehabilitation, civil society engagement and victims' voices. Functioning as a nucleus within the international counter-terrorism network, ICCT connects experts, policymakers, civil society actors and practitioners from different fields by providing a platform for productive collaboration, practical analysis, and exchange of experiences and expertise, with the ultimate aim of identifying innovative and comprehensive approaches to preventing and countering terrorism.

Executive Summary

This Research Paper explores and questions some assumed causal links between terrorism on the one hand and (forced and irregular) migration on the other:

- A. State terrorism as main cause of migration?
- B. State failure as cause of terrorism and migration?
- C. Non-state terrorism as cause of migration?
- D. (Civil) War as major cause of terrorism and migration?
- E. Refugee camps and diasporas as causes (and targets) of terrorism?
- F. Migrants as terrorists? Terrorists as migrants?
- G. Counter-Terrorist operations as cause of forced migration?

Twenty findings emerged from the study:

1. The study of terrorism and the study of migration have been two separate fields. While there is a huge literature on both, migration and on terrorism, there are no in-depth studies on the intersection of the two phenomena.
2. International migration is driven not just by political violence, armed conflict and state repression but just as much by economic and environmental factors. This type of migration is likely to grow enormously in the years to come due to climate change and loss of employment opportunities due to globalisation.
3. There are multiple causal relations between (forced/irregular) migration and terrorism - but these are generally complex.
4. While it is, in concrete situations, difficult to isolate specific factors as being responsible for migration, a major driver of forced migration is severe state repression involving attacks on civilian populations that, in cases of (civil) war, often also amount to war crimes or war-time terrorism.
5. Terrorism by non-state actors with deliberate attacks on civilians is also a major driver of forced migration; such displacements are sometimes unintended by-products of insurgent terrorism, and sometimes a deliberate policy.
6. The more incidents of terrorism and the higher their lethality, the more out-migration from an affected country has been observed.

7. Data from Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria – and to a lesser extent Pakistan - show that the number of first-time asylum seekers in Europe is correlated to the number of deaths from terrorism in the countries of origin.
8. The Islamic State (IS) claims that migration (*hijra*) to the Caliphate is an individual obligation for all Muslims. On the other hand, its Caliph considers those who leave its territory for other countries as ‘infidels’. There are some indications that IS seeks to tax these emigrants in cooperation with criminal smugglers and also uses the refugee stream for the infiltration of (returning) foreign fighters into Europe.
9. The Assad regime in Syria has deliberately targeted civilians as an instrument of warfare in order to deprive the insurgents of a supportive environment. More internal and external displacement has been caused by the regime than by the IS.
10. The large majority of refugees in the world – 86 percent according to one count – are to be found in developing countries. Refugee camps are sometimes used by terrorists for radicalisation and recruitment and as bases from which to launch attacks. This has been true for Palestinian terrorism as well as for attacks emanating from refugee camps in places like Pakistan.
11. Refugee camps and asylum centres in developing countries as well as in Europe have also become targets of terrorist attacks. The arson attacks we have seen on asylum centres, for instance in Germany or Sweden, clearly serve a communicative purpose and there is no good reason not to call such attacks also acts of terrorism.
12. Diasporas of people from countries experiencing repression, civil war or terrorism at home can become places of conspiracy and plotting of terrorist attacks. In the 1990s, London became a crucial hub for jihadist terrorists which made some French security officials to call it “Londonistan” for its terrorist plotting. More recently, Molenbeek in Belgium serves as such a hub.
13. Some children of immigrants to Western diasporas, insufficiently integrated into the host society and being caught between two cultures, have, in a search for identity and meaning, looked at jihadists as role models and thousands of them have migrated to Syria to become foreign fighters.
14. Migrants can be terrorists and terrorists can be migrants in a number of ways:
 - a. migration to the Caliphate is portrayed as an individual Muslim obligation and has attracted thousands of young Muslims in Western diasporas;

- b. some jihadists who cannot return to their country of origin without being arrested migrate from one jihadist theatre of war to the next (Afghanistan – Bosnia – Chechnya – Somalia – Syria – Libya);
 - c. some economic migrants are abducted and forced by terrorists to join their ranks – a practice they also use for captured children and women, e.g. by Boko Haram in northern Nigeria;
 - d. a few foreign fighters have engaged in acts of terrorism, including suicide terrorism, upon migrating back to their home countries as part of refugee streams.
15. The arrival of large refugee populations, when not properly handled, increases the risk of attacks in the recipient country by both domestic and transnational terrorists.
16. Historically, the number of criminals and terrorists in mass migration movements has been low - but terrorists often have a criminal background to begin with.
17. Not only terrorism can cause refugee flows and internal displacement but also counter-terrorist operations can cause large displacements of people.
18. Migration control for the control of terrorism is a widely used instrument. However, it might hurt *bona fide* migrants and legal foreign residents more than *mala fide* terrorists. It fosters xenophobia and deprives host countries, where and when it has the effect of reducing migration and hospitality to foreigners, of the many positive contributions (some types of) migrants can make to a society. There is the additional danger that instruments of migration control for counter-terrorism are, further down the line, also used for controlling native citizens.
19. While migrants and refugees have occasionally been instrumentalised by governments, the thesis that the current migration stream to Europe is a Russian plot to destabilise Europe is far-fetched and not supported by empirical evidence.
20. The interface between terrorism and migration is a rich field for research that deserves all the attention it can get so that well- and ill-founded concerns can be separated and policies can be built on solid evidence. This exploratory study has sketched some avenues for further research but cannot provide definitive answers.

The Research Paper concludes with two policy recommendations that can go some way towards disentangling the issues of (refugee) migration and terrorism. One of them refers to committing migrants to respect the political culture and values of European countries while the second refers to an obligation of migrants to inform the authorities on security issues related to terrorism and radicalisation.

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