



Crafty Bastards[®] Spotlight

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Nexus Between Criminality and Terrorism a Rising Concern for European Officials

The mid-February attack in Copenhagen and January's attack in Paris by criminals who were radicalized in jail highlight the nexus between criminals and terrorists and underscores the potential for an increase in radicalization of offenders and others who lack a sense of belonging. Analysts and government officials have long known about the relationship between organized crime and terrorism, but the high numbers of Europeans who have traveled to Syria—which some experts place at more than 10,000—risk becoming a cadre of criminal lone wolves who could plan and execute attacks with limited financial, communication, coordination, and logistical infrastructure—decreasing the possibility of detection and disruption.

- Omar Abdel Hamid El-Hussein, who killed one person at a free speech forum and another at a synagogue, was known to Danish security services for gang-related activity, but not extremism, according to press reporting¹; similarly, French citizens Said and Cherif Kouachi, the perpetrators of attacks on a Paris newspaper, were under French surveillance from 2011 until 2014².
- Common characteristics of the attackers in France and Denmark include having a violent past and criminal record, easy access to weapons, resentment toward the country in which they were born, and deep-seated anti-Semitism, according to multiple press reports^{3,4}. In addition to Hussein, two of the attackers in Paris were petty criminals who were radicalized in jail, according to separate press reporting⁵.
- Individuals such as these are being targeted by violent extremists who have urged them in online forums to conduct attacks in Europe, America, Australia, France, and Denmark, according to press reporting⁶.

¹ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/14/copenhagen-cartoonist-charlie-hebdo-style-attack>.

² <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/france-tracking-hundreds-in-possible-terrorist-sleeper-cells/>.

³ http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/getting-a-gun-legally-in-europe-may-be-hard-but-terrorists-have-little-trouble/2015/02/19/9eb6bce2-b78b-11e4-bc30-a4e75503948a_story.html.

⁴ <http://www.cnn.com/2015/02/16/europe/denmark-attack-jihadi-problem/>.

⁵ <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/france-tracking-hundreds-in-possible-terrorist-sleeper-cells/>.

⁶ <http://www.cnn.com/2015/02/16/europe/denmark-attack-jihadi-problem/>.



The same criteria required by criminals to operate—availability of weapons, access to a safe haven or area of operation, and funds—also apply to terrorists, but security officials' ability to identify and track their activities is hampered. A French criminologist stated publicly last week that the legal system frequently labels offenders as either criminals or terrorists, but those who are both tend to fall through the cracks.

- Despite Europe's strict anti-gun measures, the open-border policies that allow free movement of people and goods among many countries also limit the ability to monitor and restrict the movement of weapons, according to press reporting⁷. The number of weapons available illicitly has mushroomed in the past two decades, largely because of the proliferation of firearms into Western Europe after the Balkan wars of the 1990s, according to a report by the Library of Congress⁸, and an influx of arms recently from conflicts of North Africa, according to the same press report.
- Hundreds of non-governed spaces, coined "no-go zones," in Europe allow fertile ground for the growth of criminal activities and fodder for radicalization by Islamists. These poor suburbs are known for high crime, high unemployment and poor integration. Drug and weapons dealers operate easily in these locations, and residents become "streetwise" to the operations of authorities, according to a criminologist⁹.
- Furthermore, carrying out an individual attack with weapons, rather than explosives, is relatively inexpensive. The Paris attackers were able to obtain an entire arsenal of AK-47 assault rifles, pistols, a submachine gun, and a rocket-propelled-grenade launcher for about \$5000, according to press reporting¹⁰.

Combatting an impending emergence of criminals-turned-terrorists will take multi-pronged efforts in expanding legal authorities to assist security services, economic development in "no-go zones" in Europe and elsewhere, and political pressure on governments to ensure the protection of human rights. Such initiatives could help address the environmental causes that push criminals to turn into terrorists and add to law enforcement's arsenal to stop the process.

- At this week's three-day summit on countering violent extremism, President Obama proposed a series of commitments aimed at stemming the economic and political

⁷ http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/getting-a-gun-legally-in-europe-may-be-hard-but-terrorists-have-little-trouble/2015/02/19/9eb6bce2-b78b-11e4-bc30-a4e75503948a_story.html.

⁸ "THE NEXUS AMONG TERRORISTS, NARCOTICS TRAFFICKERS, WEAPONS PROLIFERATORS, AND ORGANIZED CRIME NETWORKS IN WESTERN EUROPE," Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 2002, p. 1.

⁹ <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/paris-terror-attacks-60-minutes/>.

¹⁰ http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/getting-a-gun-legally-in-europe-may-be-hard-but-terrorists-have-little-trouble/2015/02/19/9eb6bce2-b78b-11e4-bc30-a4e75503948a_story.html.



grievances shared by disaffected and alienated youth, both in the US and abroad¹¹, such as promoting entrepreneurship, freedom of expression, and anti-corruption efforts.

- The European Parliament at the end of February plans to submit for review a proposal that would allow the collection, use, and retention of passenger name record (PNR) data—which includes names, dates of birth, and other personal identifiers—to improve its ability to identify and track potential criminals and terrorists traveling to and from Syria. A similar measure failed to pass last year because of privacy concerns, but the recent attacks in France and Denmark and concerns about the growing threat posed by Europeans returning home after fighting in Syria and Iraq has bolstered the chance of the proposal's passage, according to a European Parliament news release¹².
- In addition, French authorities are considering introducing legislation that would treat the online access of jihadi materials the same as child pornography. Criminalizing online access and improving intelligence services' ability to monitor suspects' electronic communications could decrease—or at least help intercept and predict—the radicalization of criminals, according to a mid-February interview with French Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve¹³.

¹¹ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2015/02/19/president-obama-causes-and-antidotes-violent-extremism>.

¹² <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/content/20150217STO24619/html/Timothy-Kirkhope-PNR-is-a-key-tool-for-tackling-terrorism-and-criminality>.

¹³ <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/france-tracking-hundreds-in-possible-terrorist-sleeper-cells/>.