The links between terrorism and transnational organized crime pose an emerging challenge to international peace and security. Academics and policymakers alike recognize the multiple and complex ways in which terrorism and organized crime may intersect. There has been, however, inadequate attention to the opportunities and challenges in addressing the crime-terrorism nexus. As a step in this direction, this memo offers a conceptual framework for thinking systematically about national responses to terrorism-crime connections and applies that framework to Tajikistan. Burdened by the residual effects of state failure and a destructive civil war (1992-1997), a 900-mile border with Afghanistan (the world’s largest opiate producer and the sanctuary of fragments of Al Qaeda, the Taliban, and ISIS), and a weak central government control that still struggles to exercise full control over its regions, Tajikistan remains a critical intersection of organized criminal organizations, drug trafficking, and potential terrorist activity.

**CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: ASSESSING STATE RESPONSES TO THE TERRORISM-TRAFFICKING NEXUS**

State capacity to respond to the terrorism-trafficking nexus can be analyzed across two dimensions – the *capability* and the *willingness* to address the terrorism/trafficking nexus. State *capability* answers the question: “Does the state have the institutional, human, financial, and other resources to address the nexus?” State *willingness* asks whether the government is sufficiently motivated to put formal policies and strategies into action as well as apply technical/financial/human resources effectively. Depending on the answers to these questions, we infer four types of state capacity (summarized in Table 1). States with high levels on both dimensions possess *hegemonic state capacity* (when state offices are able to effectively translate their high institutional, technical, financial, and human capabilities into preventing, monitoring, and dismantling the nexus). States with high capabilities but low levels of willingness to apply those capabilities possess *captured state capacity* (when state offices are used to protect and
serve interests and activities within the trafficking/terrorism nexus that severely limits the effective use of national capabilities. States with low capabilities but high levels of willingness to apply their capabilities possess degraded state capacity (when state offices attempt but only partially succeed in preventing, monitoring, and dismantling the terrorism/trafficking nexus). States with low levels on both dimensions possess failed state capacity (when state offices cease to exercise any influence over the interests and activities within the trafficking/terrorism nexus, which in turn challenges the authority of the state itself).

Table 1. Outcomes of State Capacities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High Willingness to Address Nexus</th>
<th>Low Willingness to Address Nexus</th>
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<tr>
<td>High Capability to Address Nexus</td>
<td>Hegemonic State Capacity</td>
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<td>Low Capability to Address Nexus</td>
<td>Degraded State Capacity</td>
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<td>Captured State Capacity</td>
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<td>Failed State Capacity</td>
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ASSESSING THE STATE RESPONSE IN TAJIKISTAN

The struggle for centralized control. Following its civil war, Tajikistan’s central government has struggled to reestablish control over many parts of the country. One regime strategy for stabilizing postwar Tajikistan was to cede control over key institutions (including parts of the security apparatus) to former commanders and prominent politicians. Unfortunately, this strategy did little to stabilize power within Tajikistan because the new leaders used their power to establish ties to organized criminal groups and the drug trade. As a result of their actions, Tajikistan has become the most prominent destination for opium trafficked from Afghanistan. As illustrated in Figure 1, most of the drugs trafficking in Tajikistan pass through the densely populated Hatlon Province which borders Afghanistan’s provinces of Badakhshan, Takhar, and Kunduz. Opium poppy cultivation has been ongoing in Afghanistan’s Badakhshan Province, which also serves as the central point for drug trafficking networks in the region. Both Takhar and Kunduz serve as transit points for opium trafficking from other Afghan provinces. Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO) in the east of Tajikistan has seen smaller drug trafficking volumes (in part because it has been economically depressed since independence and is less accessible than the rest of Tajikistan).
Changes in Security Infrastructure. Over the past 20 years, however, Tajikistan’s security apparatus has markedly changed to meet the needs of an increasingly closed authoritarian state that is rife with corruption. Despite stark advancements in security capabilities in specific areas (i.e., CCTV monitoring throughout parts of Dushanbe, forensic resources, border infrastructure, technical equipment and training for special forces), these advancements have had mixed effects. On one hand, increased technical and human capabilities have improved Tajikistan’s overall security (i.e., more professionalized policing, lower crime rates, greater sense of security among the public), maintained monitoring and surveillance of religious activity, and reduced insurgent/terrorist attacks in the country. In particular, there has also been a significant decline in the number of terrorist attacks and episodes of instability. While several prominent ones are well known in 2010, 2012, and 2014 – indicative of weak state capacity in certain security areas – the number of these events has been reduced and no longer appears to many experts interviewed to be a significant issue. On the other hand, advancing Tajikistan’s security capabilities has enabled the government to consolidate drug trafficking under its control and has fostered a highly repressive state that targets regime opponents, civil society groups, and ordinary citizens. Moreover, these advancements have not led to coordination among security agencies or the anti-corruption efforts needed to effectively address the terrorism/trafficking nexus. It has, in short, produced tactical and technical skills useful in ensuring the regime’s longevity, but due to the fact that these efforts do not inculcate norms of accountability to the public nor enact important
anti-corruption reforms – both critical to addressing ongoing and future intersections of trafficking, terrorism, and organized crime – it has failed to address the terrorism/trafficking nexus within its borders.

**Coordination and Capacity among Security Agencies.** Interviewees identified the National Security Service’s (NSS) Council as the main coordinating agency. It holds monthly meetings involving educational institutions, the Prosecutor’s office, the Border Control Committee, the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA), the Drug Control Agency (DCA), and the Anti-Corruption Agency, but it pursues a sectoral approach to security in which some agencies focus solely on drug trafficking and organized crime (DCA, Ministry of Defense) and others focus solely on religious extremism and instability (Parliament’s subcommittee on religion). Beyond the NSS’ Council, there have been fewer efforts at coordinating security agencies than reported by interviewees in Kyrgyzstan. As one Tajikistani law enforcement official noted, “each respective [security] agency functions as an individual silo that only protects its interests.” We might infer from this quote that security agencies within Tajikistan largely eschew information sharing and joint actions. Interviews also indicated that the NSS Council tends to focus on topical issues – such as extremists in Afghanistan or tracking Tajikistani migrants traveling to Syria as ISIS recruits – and less on long-term strategies in dealing with the nexus. Moreover, security agencies’ self-reporting shows that trends in their rates of drug seizures vary greatly, suggesting little inter-agency cooperation (see Figure 2).

The DCA highlights the limits of uneven security capabilities. Under Director Rustam Nazarov (2004-2015), and as a recipient of considerable foreign assistance, the DCA was deemed fairly effective by criminologists and drug trafficking experts in the region. It had built up a strategic analysis section, staffed with approximately 50 analysts, to collect and analyze statistics on criminal activity and security threats – an institutional capability that far exceeded its counterparts elsewhere in the government. And it acquired special permission to pay its personnel high salaries, engendering greater professionalization. Yet, the DCA’s improved capacity was still limited by the fact that it was only one agency among several. In 2015, Nazarov was reportedly removed not long after a two-year investigation of corruption and drug trafficking led to 30-40 arrests (including some senior officials).

**The Collusion of State in the Drug Trade.** Overall, the drug trade has become less visible, yet most interviewees were convinced this was because it had been effectively centralized under the control of the ruling elite (with many believing those ties extended to the presidential administration). All NGO and most law enforcement interviewees felt that drug trafficking is supported and protected by a range of officials, including border officers, customs officials, and those in the DCA and MIA. Low pay and advance payments for senior government and security (border patrol) positions lead officials to engage in the drug trade to recoup costs. As one NSSC official noted, there are many “hidden hands” aiding the drug trade that serve as intermediaries
enabling former warlords and others in this illegal activity. A NGO team leader reflected a common view in stating that high-profile dealers and sellers are protected in many areas in the country while low-profile dealers and traffickers are turned over to keep up an image of regular seizures and arrests. One indication of continued drug trafficking is the construction boom in Dushanbe over the past decade, which several interviewees viewed as a means of laundering money from narcotics sales.

**Figure 2. Drug Seizures by State Agency (in kilograms), Tajikistan, 1998-2009**

![Graph showing drug seizures by state agency](image)


**Monitoring of Religious Activities.** Unlike Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan has devoted resources to monitoring religious activity, including the Committee on Religion and Regulation of National Traditions that cooperates with law enforcement agencies to detect and prevent illegal religious activity and extremist groups in Tajikistan. According to one NGO official, detections (and incarcerations) of such actors by his Committee are countrywide but have been particularly active in Sughd Province. Some law enforcement interviewees viewed the government’s stricter regime towards religious freedom as a sign of increased security capacity, but many respondents viewed this trend as a source of instability and disillusionment among poorer and younger members of society. Moreover, respondents also confirmed that greater institutionalization of security offices has extended their control over and extortion of local businesses and members of the public.

**Recent Subnational Trends.** At the subnational level, individual regions have recently come to exemplify captured state capacity (as summarized in Table 2). State capacities in Hatlon and Sughd Provinces have shifted from degraded in the early post-civil war years (1997-2005) to captured (2005-present). Numerous reports find that small-scale traders and local traffickers were targeted in counter-trafficking efforts while larger organized syndicates remained untouched, allowing the latter to dominate the drug trade. Rather than centralized cartels or mafia
organizations, these regions contain several competing medium-sized groups that were residual formations of warlord militias from the civil war. These groups have been absorbed into and controlled by regional and national political elites, who have influenced counter-trafficking efforts to eliminate rivals and force many of these groups to support the regime. The arrests of senior government officials (or their relatives) for involvement in drug trafficking – such as the son of the head of Tajikistan Railways and the brother of a deputy head of the national security service – support this analysis.\(^3\) As a result of such collaborative arrangements, these regions experience high-levels of drug trafficking and drug seizures, but relatively little drug-related violence.

### Table 2. Periodization and Subnational Cases of State Capacities

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<td><strong>Sughd Province</strong></td>
<td>Degraded</td>
<td>Degraded</td>
<td>Captured</td>
<td>Captured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GBAO</strong></td>
<td>Failed</td>
<td>Degraded</td>
<td>Degraded</td>
<td>Captured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Taj.-Afghan. border</strong></td>
<td>Failed</td>
<td>Degraded</td>
<td>Captured</td>
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Some interviewees have identified Sughd Province as a region of specific concern because 1) the region has experienced a small uptick in the past decade in violent attacks by extremists as well as border conflicts with Kyrgyzstan (at times involving security agencies and drug traffickers), 2) instability might lead to intervention from neighboring Uzbekistan (whose new president was born in Sughd), 3) the security apparatus is more locally controlled than security apparatuses in other regions, and 4) efforts by the center to seize particular assets in the region have been opposed by the latter’s elite.

Other interviewees, especially law enforcement officials, viewed Lower Panj (Nizhnii Pyanj) District in Hatlon Province as an area where intersections of drug trafficking, organized crime, religious extremism, and broader cross-border security concerns were more pronounced. Likewise, corruption within state security offices in Hatlon Province has been a particular concern – as shown by a corruption scandal when high ranking officials within the provincial and district police forces were implicated in drug trafficking and ties to organized crime groups.

Tajikistan’s border with Afghanistan is also a significant security concern. The removal of Russian troops from manning Tajikistan’s 900-mile border with Afghanistan in the mid-2000s has led to an intensive effort to improve the equipment, staffing, and training of its border patrols. As an official working with UN programs on border management noted, Border Control, Customs Control, and NSS are active at six major border-crossing points and four cross-border markets (where trade occurs) between Tajikistan and Afghanistan. At these checkpoints, agents check documents for forgeries, look for persons of interest to law enforcement agencies,
and inspect goods and cargo passing through. The same official also noted that despite advancements within these agencies, especially Border Control, those who patrol the border continue to lack advanced vehicles and equipment (e.g., boats to patrol the Pyanj River, new helicopters, drones, etc.).

In contrast to Khatlon and Sughd Provinces, GBAO has experienced far less drug trafficking and organized criminal activity, yet a number of episodes of violent conflict have arisen relating to insurgents and alleged terrorist networks leading to Afghanistan. GBAO has the lowest level of drug seizures in Tajikistan by 2008-09, a marked contrast to its role as an important hub of trafficking in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Most interviewees, though, attribute this decline to the consolidation of drug trafficking under regional officials with ties to the central government. Security officials in GBAO’s capital city (Khorog) and major villages are typically drawn from Hatlon Province – a strategy by which the center can reliably monitor local populations there. However, this has created potential conflict between these officials and local leaders in the province and appears to have contributed to open clashes among state security actors.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF CAPTURED STATE CAPACITY: SHORT TERM SUCCESS, LONG TERM RISK

As Tajikistan demonstrates, enhanced security can bring significant advances to addressing the nexus in the short term. However, captured state capacity generates specific risk factors – eroded governance and accountability, arms/weapon diffusion, widespread abuses of authority, and moral hazard problems – that pose important long-term vulnerabilities to the terrorism-trafficking nexus.

In the short term, enhanced technical resources and training have helped the regime address particular areas of the terrorism-trafficking nexus: professionalized policing has reduced crime, advanced surveillance tracks religious activity, and technical capabilities have thwarted insurgent/terrorist attacks. These improvements have also enhanced the center’s control across its territory and reduced regional tensions. While rumors and conspiracies abound in Tajikistan, most regional clashes have been absorbed within security institutions – occurring in part due to conflicts over influence between security personnel – and residual tensions from its civil war only indirectly undercut state security.

Several risks, however, threaten to undermine Tajikistan’s ability to address the nexus over the long run. First, enhanced security sector capabilities appear to have significantly undermined governance in Tajikistan by reinforcing the regime’s dependence on “praetorian guards,” by increasing rent-seeking behavior within law enforcement and by fostering a general lack of accountability to the public. These emerging trends have made it more difficult for the regime to engage the public, especially religious communities in the north and east that have been targeted
by repression. Likewise, several visible episodes of defection from and clashes within security institutions – including one defection to ISIS – suggest that the diffusion of arms, persons, and expertise to non-state actors remains an ongoing concern. Often spurred by corruption and conflict over the drug trade, defections and clashes indicate deep fissures within security institutions that substantially and directly affect Tajikistan’s security capacity to deal with the nexus. Enhanced security has lead to a number of abuses of authority, including unlawful applications of force extortion and targeting of religious groups. This poses a prevalent risk to addressing the nexus as it potentially drives those estranged by the state into criminal activity (especially drug trafficking) or toward religious communities. Lastly, moral hazard problems – in which security actors forgo actions against particular threats in order to encourage continued investment in their agencies – are a concern given security offices’ simultaneous dependence on profits from drug trafficking and external security sector assistance (that is often specifically designed to combat this problem).

This assessment suggests that external security sector assistance from states and IOs alike should: 1) continue to provide technical support for developing Tajikistan’s security infrastructure; 2) expand institutional support (training, increased staff pay, anti-corruption efforts) to agencies beyond the DCA; 3) make all current and future support contingent upon measures that eliminate abuses of authority, diminish predatory rent-seeking behavior, and end violations of civil and religious rights; and 4) develop independent means of assessing security agencies’ activities to deter moral hazard problems.

1 This memo is part of the Minerva Research Initiative funded program, “Trafficking/Terrorism Nexus in Eurasia,” and is based on a series of semi-structured expert interviews conducted in Central Asia in 2016.
5 These are adapted from Stephen Watts, Identifying and Mitigating Risks in Security Sector Assistance for Africa’s Fragile States (Santa Monica, Calif.: Rand Corporation, 2015).