



COVID-19 and the Criminal Mind – No.1

The Crime-Terror Nexus:

The Italian Mafia and COVID-19

a short compendium of primary sources and selected case studies of COVID-19 events

April 24, 2024

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Executive Summary

1. COVID-19 is reshaping the socio-economic norms of the globe. It is concomitantly recalibrating the ideational and operational dynamics of the criminal and terrorist underworlds and their relationship with the upperworlds that host them. These are evolving in tandem with the global response to the current pandemic. The emerging threat, like the virus that spawned it, would be best considered now in its gestation – before it irrevocably insinuates itself into society under the cover of distraction provided by COVID-19.

2. There has been a wide variety of strategic, tactical and ideological reactions by underworld actors to the new challenges and opportunities presented by COVID-19. This document is one of a series of short briefs prepared by C-CAT to highlight certain trends of that response from within the “crime – terror” nexus of that domain. The memos are **a short compendium of primary sources and selected case studies of current events relevant to this topic**. The memo is not designed to be comprehensive but representative, to provide a short introduction to the topic as a foundation for a broader public policy discourse.

3. The “crime-terror nexus” refers to the new hybridization or convergence of terrorism and organized crime. It has been described as “the face of 21st century crime”. The threat it poses has significant geo-political implications and is a component of what analysts have described as fourth generation, fifth generation and hybrid warfare. As noted by Michael Braun a former director of operations for the DEA: “These “hybrid” organizations – part terrorist group, part organized crime network— are “meaner and uglier than anything law enforcement or militaries have ever faced.” “[It is] no longer about crime rates. It is about global instability....”

4. Given the globalized context of the crime-terror interface, the behaviours of any specific group within the underworld matrix can and do reverberate within others. Understanding the differences, congruities and interactivity between these players can enable us to develop more targeted and effective responses, and also can provide better tools to anticipate and interdict broader behavioural trends within that domain.

5. This memo is focused on selected COVID-19-related activities of the Mafia within the Italian arena. For the purposes of this brief, the term Mafia refers specifically to several major Italian Mafia-type organisations profiled in the 2013 Europol Threat Assessment¹. These entities represent a profound threat to the national security and economic stability of the international community. Their extensive involvements in Canada and other countries are well documented. The impact of the ensuing COVID-19 upheaval on the crime-terror nexus and the Italian state, a democratic European ally of Canada, is therefore an important study with significant policy implications for western countries.

Introductory Memo

1. COVID-19 – Reshaping our Relationship with the Crime-Terror Underworld

COVID-19 is reshaping the socio-economic norms of the globe. It is concomitantly recalibrating the ideational and operational dynamics of the criminal and terrorist underworlds and their relationship with the upperworlds that host them.

For the most part, the residents of the “upperworld” are unaware of just how economically, socially, and politically intertwined these two realms functionally and structurally are. As a society we constantly brush up against and interact with, the tentacles of the crime-terror nexus and the multi-trillion-dollar illicit economy which fuels it. Changes within one domain therefore reverberate profoundly within the other, and the current upheaval will continue to transform the contours of this interrelationship long after the pandemic itself has hopefully been contained.

As such, the national security concerns predating COVID-19, generated by this vast web of illegality and violence, are evolving in tandem with the global response to this pandemic. This emerging threat, like the virus that has spawned it, would be best considered now in its gestation – before it irrevocably insinuates itself into society under the cover of distraction provided by COVID-19. This memo is one of a series of short briefs prepared by C-CAT to highlight certain trends of that response from within the “crime – terror” nexus of that domain. The memo is a short compendium of primary sources and selected case studies of current events relevant to this topic. It is not designed to be comprehensive but representative, to provide a short introduction to the topic as a foundation for a broader public policy discourse.

2. The Import of the Crime-Terror Nexus

→ Traditional Typologies — Proxies, Criminals, Insurgents (Terrorists), and Warlords

“Since at least the late Cold War period, policymakers and academics have acknowledged the importance of “nonstate actors,” a loosely defined category that included multinational corporations, terrorist groups, criminal syndicates, liberation movements, and many other types of entities. But in certain contexts, “nonstate actor” is not a meaningful label for the myriad entities the term sought to describe. The current political environment requires more discerning and precise terms to categorize a broad spectrum of actors.”²

Proxies – “In zones of eroded state authority, armed movements have played a leading and transformative role. Some are simply shadowy arms of the state, even when they

are designed to operate as if they were autonomous groups. Examples of such stealth state bodies include the Fedayeen Saddam, an Iraqi paramilitary group from the Saddam Hussein era; the various Syrian progovernment militias, including some of the groups working under the National Defence Forces umbrella; and Russian operatives, disguised as local militias, deployed in former Soviet republics. Others are classic proxies – militias set up by a sponsor government, which operate with a veneer of independence but are in fact wholly controlled by their sponsor and serve their sponsor’s policy aims.”³

Criminals, Insurgents (Terrorists), and Warlords – In many areas of the globe and more particularly in the Middle East, “the unitary state has retreated to the point where nonstate armed actors have supplanted their authority. The literature traditionally has divided these actors into three distinct categories: criminal organizations, insurgents (or terrorists), and warlords (or militias). All three types of actors use actual or threatened violence to achieve their aims”.⁴ In this traditional framework the differences between these entities was understood to lie in their ultimate objectives. “Criminal organizations ... evade or break the law for financial (but not political) gains. Insurgent groups [including terrorist groups] ... use violence for political ends, by challenging the existence of the state in pursuit of a new legal order. Warlords, by contrast, do not threaten to take over the state, nor do they seek to merely exploit the collapse of legal authority for monetary gain. Instead, they are more interested in their own local governance model. Warlords, whether in antiquity or modern times, are charismatic leaders who operate in areas where the state’s capabilities and legitimacy do not extend. The warlord wields some degree of political power, but also pays allegiance to the state or other stronger powers, in return for being left alone to govern his constituents in the periphery.”⁵

→ The New “Crime-Terror Nexus” – The Face of 21st Century Crime

Like the coronavirus, the underworld in all its variegated formulations has been enabled and accelerated by globalization. This in turn has resulted in operational and structural adaptations within that domain to capitalize on new opportunities and markets. Experts have sought to develop new models of contending with this new hybridization of or symbiosis and convergence with terrorism, organized crime and the even the more garden verities of criminal activity. This new framework has been described by some as “the face of 21st century crime”:

- “These “hybrid” organizations – part terrorist group, part organized crime network— are “meaner and uglier than anything law enforcement or militaries have ever faced.”⁶ “[It is] no longer about crime rates. It is about global instability...”⁷ (Michael Braun former assistant administrator and chief of operations at the DEA)

- “With globalization, terrorists and criminal groups have internationalized their support and operations, brokered formidable alliances, and present complex transnational threats that put security and prosperity at risk around the world.”⁸ (Celine B. Realuyo is Professor of Practice at the William J. Perry Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies at the National Defense University)
- “The activities of criminal groups displace state and government institutions, usually weak to begin with, in the areas where they establish a foothold. This, in turn, creates greater social disorder that can be exploited by terrorists....”⁹ (Angel Rabasa et al.– RAND Corporation)

3. The Crime-Terror Nexus and the State

COVID-19’s impact on the crime-terror nexus and its relationship with its host states will significantly impact national security policy making in the post pandemic world.

That relationship between nonstate actors (NSAs) and the upperworld states is complex:

“Often, NSAs have filled the vacuum caused by the retreat of weak, quasi or failing states.... Nonstate actors perform state-like functions and enjoy the empirical habits of statehood but lack de jure recognition. In countries across the Middle East and North Africa, political opposition networks, local communities, and identity groups (including, for example, Salafi and jihadist groups) provide basic services that existing states have failed to supply. The lines between the formal and informal are blurred because there is a gap between de facto realities and what is established under law.”¹⁰

There is an expansive body of literature debating the nature of the crime-terror nexus and its relationship to state structures, governance, and what has been termed “licit” and “illicit” notions of “sovereignty”.¹¹ A full explication of the debate is beyond the purview of this memo. But a brief overview of the basic relational models between state and nonstate entities posited in this analytic framework is provided below:

→ The Common Denominator: Corruption and Exploiting the State

Virtually all violent non-state actors (NSA) interfere with and infiltrate state-building processes and undermine structures of governance: “Transnational crime can exist separately from terrorism, but almost all terrorism is now dependent on criminal activity to funds its work. Corruption is a key tool for terrorists, just as it is for members

of organized crime. Terrorists are dependent not only on crime for revenues, but criminal activity provides recruits employment, Criminal organizations help terrorists with ... logistics—moving people and goods across borders, paying off corrupt officials, facilitating illegal financial flows, and furnishing weapons needed for operations....”¹²

→ Coexistence – “Sharing” Sovereignty with the State

Professor Louise Shelley ... has described the way the state and organised crime are ‘sharing sovereignty’, in order to argue that organised crime does not rebel against the state. Indeed, sharing sovereignty in this sense means corrupting the state....¹³ “The parasitic relationship of organized crime to society can be better understood by looking at J.H. Miller’s reflection on the host and the parasite”¹⁴ :

There is no parasite without its host. At the same time both word and counterword [States and criminal organisations] subdivide and reveal themselves each to be fissured already within themselves and to be ... an ... antithetical word.¹⁵

- Shared sovereignty as a model was reflected most clearly in the modus operandi of “older crime groups, often in long-established states, have developed along with their states and are dependent on existing institutional and financial structures to move their products and invest their profits....”¹⁶ Through corruption and movement into the lawful economy, these groups minimize the risk of prosecution and therefore do not fear the power of state institutions. ...By corrupting and sometimes penetrating the state, these crime groups create a collusive relationship, expending significant amounts of human and financial capital to influence the state. They may, therefore, contribute to political campaigns, run candidates for office, or vote as a bloc to influence the electoral process, as has happened in Italy. In Colombia, before the emergence of large-scale guerilla movements, noted drug trafficker Pablo Escobar ran for parliament and developed a political party.”¹⁷
- “Often these crime groups are highly nationalistic [or at least align themselves with certain aspects of nationalistic behaviour]. The Yakuza in Japan served the Emperor prior to World War II by putting down political opponents. Their high degree of nationalism has made them allies of the conservative Japanese police, neutralizing control of their activities until recently. Also during World War II, elements of the mafia in the United States guarded the waterfront in order to prevent German sabotage.”¹⁸
- “... It is clear that the crime groups have interests that coincide with the long-term ability of the state to maintain its viability. This symbiotic relationship has proved valuable to the rise of traditional crime groups. Italian and Japanese

organized crime groups have benefited enormously from the post-war recoveries of their countries. They have profited from valuable public construction contracts possibly as much as from their illegal activities. The economic development of the state is therefore of paramount importance to them because they are parasites on the state's economy and financial institutions.”¹⁹

→ **Supplanting the Sovereignty of the State**

- “Corruption facilitates crime and terrorism as it undermines governance, the economy, health, social order, and sustainable development in all regions of the globe. Pernicious non-state actors, such as criminals and terrorists, intentionally penetrate the state, often entering legislative bodies to shape laws in their favor. They, therefore de-legitimize state institutions, facilitating the rise of parallel structures that challenge state forces. Corrupt officials, through their positions, allow illicit actors to operate and generate revenues and provide social services. Therefore, this large-scale corruption undermines state capacity and legitimacy, and weakens state institutions. The absence of a functioning state makes citizens more ready to turn to non-state actors for employment and social services.”²⁰
- “The proceeds of the criminal activity of pernicious non-state actors are used to ensure that the citizens do not see them just as a negative force in the community, helping to ensure their future impunity. In many different regions of the world, criminal and terrorist groups such as the FARC, drug cartels, Hamas, or ISIS step in as service providers, thereby obtaining the good will of citizens. This has been seen with the Yakuza in Japan, after the 1995 Kobe earthquake, when the criminals provided aid in the absence of state services. In Brazil’s favelas, drug traffickers furnish service to their communities.¹² In Colombia, the FARC, at its height, financed, schools, medical clinics and infrastructure support. Other terrorist groups in many regions of the world have also provided services to the community, enhancing their legitimacy. Therefore, parallel institutions to the state emerge and are sustained, further undermining the government’s legitimacy.”²¹

→ **Destroying the Sovereignty of the State**

- “The rise of globalization after the fall of the Soviet Union has contributed to the rise of newer transnational crime actors. Increased international transport, communications, and mobility have given smaller groups increased access to international markets. Moreover, globalization has marginalized and

impoverished many communities.... Their only means of survival is to enter into the shadow economy. The declining importance of the nation-state in recent decades has fostered these new forms of transnational crime groups. New transnational crime groups, however, thrive in the chaos of war and enduring conflicts. They have no interest in the endurance of the state; rather, their profits are made by destabilizing the state and its structures.”²²

- “There are important reasons why the new types of transnational crime share common interests with terrorists. The newer crime groups most often linked to terrorism have interest in a secure state. In fact, they promote grievances, because it is through the prolongation of conflict that they enhance their profits. There is no disincentive for them to cooperate with terrorists because they want neither stability nor a state that can control them. ...The terrorist-transnational crime relationship extends beyond a marriage of convenience that generates profits or provides logistics: it goes to the very heart of the relationship between crime groups and the state.”²³

→ Qualified Integration with the State – The Hybrid Actor

- “Hybrid actors are powerful but difficult to define; as a result, analysts and policymakers often overlook them or mistakenly consider them to be something they are not, typically a state institution or a classic proxy. Both types of actors may attract external sponsorship, usually from a state, and profess a distinct ideological identity. But hybrid actors are distinct in the way that they not only serve a security function, but also play a role in politics and economics—that is, hybrid actors assume some of the functions and autonomy of a state....”²⁴
- “...[A]nalyzes that treat hybrid actors simply as proxies deny them their agency; hybrid actors do have agency, and at times domestic political considerations force them to deviate from or reinterpret their patron’s demands. In fact, many hybrid actors are more consumed with internal competition within their countries than with the demands of their external patron.”²⁵
- “The hybrids evolved as a response to state failure, which is often the result of the long-term erosion of central power, competing power centers, and shared sovereignty. As noted by experts hybrid actors can be analyzed along two vectors: “their “stateness” (the extent to which they seek to assume state functions) and their autonomy (the degree to which they function as proxies subservient to their patron).” “They are not states as such, and yet they manage long-term relationships with states, and in many cases shape their host states through symbiotic or combative relationships.”²⁶

- “Hybrid actors ... may benefit from the tools and prerogatives of state power, but at the same time enjoy the flexibility that comes with not being the state. Hybrid actors seek to harness and control some but not all spheres of the state’s authority. Those that survive over many years tend to penetrate the state and carve out official fiefdoms within its architecture. They engage in war, diplomacy, politics, and propaganda. They build and maintain constituencies, providing not just security but also services and ideological guidance...”²⁷
- “Like a state, which provides security as well as services to the citizens that it governs, a hybrid actor views its mandate as encompassing the entire spectrum of human needs. Furthermore, the provision of social services enhances the hybrid’s military capability.”²⁸
- “To cement their power, hybrid actors rely on ideology. The most successful hybrid actors have a social mandate and a coherent, mobilizing ideology. But ideology is not the hybrid actor’s distinguishing trait; other nonstate actors that lack the characteristics of hybridity still have social engineering projects and ideology.²² Most commonly, hybrid actors instrumentalize ethno-sectarian identity to build constituencies and gain support.”²⁹
- “At some point, hybrid actors may desire to become participants in the state, To gain more state power, hybrid actors often develop formal political parties that compete in local and national elections.”³⁰
- “The mature hybrid actor, however, becomes an impediment to inclusive, equitable, and effective governance. It is immune from the state’s wider burden to govern all its citizens. If the hybrid fails to adequately provide health care, security, or a sense of belonging, it is essentially off the hook—those are the state’s responsibility, after all, and if the hybrid is able to furnish any degree of those goods it can be considered a bonus.”³¹
- “Hybrid actors “have established themselves as an enduring feature of the landscape in the Middle East and North Africa and may be the single greatest impediment to the reconstitution of state authority....”³²
- The crime-terror nexus is populated by a plethora of groups with a multitude of profiles as hybrid actors of one configuration or another. The term is generally applied to a nonstate actors (NSA) like Hezbollah, FARC, the Popular Mobilization Units of Iraq, the KDP (Kurdistan Democratic Party) and the PUK (Patriotic Union of Kurdistan).³³ But it can also find application in dealing with certain organized crime groups like the Mexican Cartels and the Italian Mafia (with the Sicilian Mafia being a particularly well developed construct for this purpose) in terms of how such entities relate to the formal state and its governance, and the import of geography and ethnic identity in the structuring and behaviours of these groups.

These stand in contrast to ISIS which “is difficult to fit into existing theoretical models. It has operated neither as a normal nonstate actor nor as a proxy of another government. But it is not a normal state entity, nor, properly speaking, is it a hybrid actor....”³⁴

4. The Threat of the Crime-Terror Nexus – Selected International Resolutions³⁵

- **Resolution 1373 (2001):** “Notes with concern the close connection between international terrorism and transnational organized crime, illicit drugs, money-laundering, illegal arms trafficking, and illegal movement of nuclear, chemical, biological and other potentially deadly materials....”
- **Resolution 2195 (2014):** “...terrorists benefit from transnational organized crime, including from the trafficking of arms, persons, drugs, and artefacts and from the illicit trade in natural resources including gold and other precious metals and stones, minerals, wildlife, charcoal and oil, kidnapping for ransom extortion and bank robbery....”
- **G20 statement (2017):** calls on all countries to “shut down all alternative sources of financing of terrorism, including dismantling the possible connections between terrorism and organized crime, such as through human trafficking”, and based on this for FATF and FSRBs to deepen its understanding of links between HMT and TF.
- **Resolution 2462 (2019):** “... terrorists can benefit from transnational organized crime as a source of financing or logistical support, recognizing that the nature and scope of the linkages between terrorism and transnational organized crime vary by context, and emphasizing the need to coordinate efforts at the local, national, regional, sub regional and international levels....”

5. The Global Economy of the Crime-Terror Nexus

“UNODC has estimated that, in 2009, illicit flows stemming from criminal proceeds amounted to some 3.6 per cent of global GDP, equivalent to about US\$ 2.1 trillion, with illicit drugs generating the largest share of income from transnational organized crime. As a share of GDP, all crime proceeds tend to be higher in developing countries and to be laundered more frequently abroad.”³⁶

6. Organized Crime in Canada

“Due to the advanced capabilities of these groups, they can be found virtually anywhere where there is a profit to be made.... According to the 2006 annual CISC report, there are nearly 800 organized crime groups operating in Canada”³⁷ [as defined in Canadian law which includes a spectrum of smaller and much larger organizations of various sorts. Organized crime in Canada generates multi-billion-dollar revenues for its facilitators while simultaneously costing Canadians multiple billions in losses.]

7. The Crime-Terror Nexus and 21st Century Warfare

→ 4GW/5GW/Hybrid Warfare Model

The tactical, operational and even ideological nexus in various configurations between entities within the domain of organized crime and terrorism has not only transformed the potential impact of nonstate actors (NSA) as a force unto itself, but it has also spawned a new 21st century weapon/fighting force deployed by nation states utilizing what has been described as fourth generation warfare(4GW), fifth generation warfare (5GW), and hybrid warfare.

The concepts of have been the subject of extensive debate amongst experts. Despite the frequent and cogent counterarguments over definitions, overlap and application, they have achieved a level of pre-eminence in the parlance of institutions like NATO³⁸, the EU and national governments in analysis of the irregular warfare continuum.³⁹

They are referenced here briefly only because these models seek to provide amongst other things, a certain framework for understanding the national security implications of the crime-terror nexus facing Canada and the international community. This framework will become increasingly important in the ensuing analysis by policy-makers of the adversarial and often competitive relationship between the upperworlds and the underworlds they host in the post COVID-19 world. A few selected quotes are provided below just to introduce these concepts and to highlight the prominence of the crime-terror nexus as a national security concern:

→ Hybrid Warfare

*“In the 21st century we have seen a tendency toward blurring the lines between the states of war and peace. (...) The role of non-military means of achieving political and strategic goals has grown, and, in many cases, they have exceeded the power of force of weapons in their effectiveness.”*⁴⁰ (Russian Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov)

- a. “From a historical perspective, hybrid warfare is certainly not a new phenomenon. In the 2000s, the use of the term hybrid became a common way to describe the changing character of contemporary warfare, not least because of the increasing sophistication and lethality of violent nonstate actors and the growing potential of cyber warfare.”⁴¹
- b. “Following the Russian ... invasion of Crimea in March 2014, hybrid warfare ... entered the wider policy domain as a significant security challenge for the West. The term hybrid warfare attempts to capture the complexity of 21st-century warfare, which involves a multiplicity of actors, blurs the traditional distinctions between types of armed conflict, and even between war and peace.”⁴²
- c. “There are many definitions of hybrid warfare and these definitions continue to evolve. Defining hybrid warfare is not just an academic exercise because these definitions may determine how states perceive and respond to hybrid threats and which government agencies are involved in countering them.”⁴³
- d. “Writing in 2007, Frank Hoffman defined hybrid warfare as “different modes of warfare including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts including indiscriminate violence and coercion, **and criminal disorder**, conducted by both sides and a variety of nonstate actors.” The integration of conventional and irregular methods of warfare arguably distinguished such hybrid wars from their historical forms. “Traditionally, conventional and irregular operations tended to take place concurrently, but separately, and operations by irregular fighters were normally secondary to campaigns by conventional military forces.”⁴⁴
- e. “The Chief of Staff of the US Land Forces, General George Casey wrote in 2008 that hybrid threats comprise “conventional, irregular, **terrorist and criminal threats**”.⁴⁵ “The US Joint Military Command considers the hybrid threat as “any adversary that simultaneously and adaptively employs a fused mix of conventional weapons, irregular tactics, **terrorism and criminal behavior** in the battle space to obtain desired political objectives”.⁴⁶ Similarly former Chief of Staff of the US Joint Forces, General Raymond Odierno, noted that “in the future it would be increasingly common for the army to operate in environments with both regular military and irregular paramilitary or civilian adversaries, **with the potential for terrorism, criminality** and other complications.”⁴⁷
- f. “[T]he use of military and non-military tools in an integrated campaign, designed to achieve surprise, seize the initiative and gain psychological as well as physical advantages utilizing diplomatic means; sophisticated and rapid information, electronic and cyber operations; covert and occasionally overt

military and intelligence action; and economic pressure.”⁴⁸ “This definition of hybrid warfare differs from those discussed earlier because it emphasizes non-military methods of conflict and, in particular, information warfare that targets public perception, a key center of gravity in contemporary conflict.”⁴⁹ “We live in a world where the old notion of war, war as a binary process, where you are at war or you are at peace, means increasingly less. So on one hand, traditional warfare is much less a usable tool. On the other hand, there is the fact that all societies now are much more casualty-averse. Even today’s Russia is not Stalin’s Soviet Union, can’t treat people as ammunition. Old traditional warfare is hardly conceivable unless it is essentially civil war where rational calculations tend to go out of the window. **This is less of a new way of war so much as a way of fighting a war in a new world.** It is the world that it has changed rather than the tactics and the ideas.”⁵⁰

- g. “New generation warfare emphasizes the use of nonkinetic techniques that **promote social upheaval and create a climate of collapse**, so that little or no military force is necessary. The armed forces have a supplementary role in this strategy. Special forces may conduct reconnaissance, subversion and espionage while, if necessary, large-scale conventional military exercises close to a target state’s borders seek to coerce and intimidate. Ideally, the use of armed force remains below the threshold that might trigger a conventional military response. Latvian analyst Jānis Bērziņš summarizes the Russian approach to modern warfare: “The main battlespace is in the mind and, as a result, new-generation wars are to be dominated by information and psychological warfare. ... The main objective is to reduce the necessity for deploying hard military power to the minimum necessary.”⁵¹
- h. **“Modern war is increasingly determined precisely by how one seeks to impact the other side’s governability ... and also how one can exploit the weaknesses of the other side’s governability.** This is not new. ...What is new is that what was seen as a disagreeable ad-hoc tactic is becoming the way the Russians are approaching full-spectrum warfare. It is just seen as another perfectly viable, legitimate opportunity. If we look at Crimea, when the “little green men” were deployed there, they were complemented by much less professional, much less uniformly uniformed, thuggish local “self-defense groups.” It has become clear that they were the gunmen of the local **organized crime groups**, pressed into service as auxiliaries. And when you look at the regime installed in Crimea from the premier down, it is very heavily penetrated by **people from within the criminal world**. The same pattern happened also in Donbass, where **organized crime figures** have become local warlords. My belief is also that some of the terrorist actions in the rest of Ukraine were

carried out not directly by sympathizers of the rebellion or Russian government agents, but actually by **organized crime figures paid by the**

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Russians. Russia is ahead of the curve in global organized crime, where you have a political-criminal-business elite, that is not formed by Tony Soprano-like figures, but from businessmen who have a portfolio of interests that ranges from the essentially legitimate through to the grey and then wholly illegal activities. **The boundaries between organized crime, intelligence operations, state-operations have become increasingly unclear.** ⁵²

- i. **"We live in an era of the insurgency of the mind.** This is not about encouraging people to blow up post offices. It is not even about encouraging people to take a particular position. Back in the Cold War period, Soviet propaganda aimed to persuade everyone else about the rightness of their position, of the Soviet way of looking to the world. The interesting thing is that the modern campaign has been flipped around. **It is not about convincing anyone else of a ... point of view so much as to undermine people's belief in any point of view, to create an environment in which no one can be quite sure about anything. ...They try to undermine our certainties.** And this links back to the governance issues. Why are people willing to believe some of the bizarre conspiracy theories that come from RT or other state-backed media? The answer is because people are mistrustful in their own governments and their own politicians, so public disillusionment becomes an opportunity. They feel they've been lied before. All the Russians are doing is tapping into all that...."⁵³
- j. "Activities categorized as below the level of armed conflict now pose a significant threat to national security, potentially on par with military threats. States are also more willing to use non-military means because of the inherent ambiguity and lack of behavioral norms associated with the use of these tools... The interdependent use of military and non-military means has blurred the lines between peace and war. These factors have created conditions in which competitors exploit the ambiguity of their actions and the lack of international norms of behavior to threaten other states in ways not previously anticipated."⁵⁴
- k. "... as a denominator, 'hybrid' identifies a combination of battle spaces, types of operations—military or non-kinetic—and a blurring of actors with the scope of achieving strategic objectives by creating 'exploitable ambiguity'."⁵⁵

→ **Fourth Generation Warfare (4GW):**

- a. The first four generations of warfare: "...First Generation involves mass manpower. Second Generation is mass firepower that replaced mass manpower where movement became based on advancing lines of firepower. Third Generation involves qualitative maneuver[ability] [as] opposed to quantitative

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fire. Lastly, the Fourth Generation represents insurgency. In Fourth Generation we see global insurgency involving franchises on non-state actors acting in coordinated concert against the state-based system. This entailed psychological warfare and the fighting against the technology of westernized, developed states where groups, such as al-Qaeda, thrived.”⁵⁶

- b. 4GW “is characterized by a return to decentralized framework of warfare and a blurring of lines tween war and politics, combatants and civilians...”⁵⁷
- c. According to Navy Lieutenant-Commander Keenan, **Transnational Criminal Organisations (TCOs), Drug Trafficking Organisations (DTOs), and Islamic extremists** are forming a transnational, “trifecta” threat in which they each participate in an ever-developing mode of conflict called fourth generation warfare (4GW). First coined in 1989, Lind used 4GW to define a decentralised form of conflict that is waged on a societal, economic, political, and psychological level. Arquilla and Ronfeldt supply the term “netwar” instead to emphasize the organisational revolution of 4GW: the network. The network is what enables this trifecta threat to come to fruition. Arquilla and Ronfeldt observe three characteristics that networks possess: 1) Informal, non-uniform relationships that vary in duration and intensity between which coordination and communication takes places on a situational, not hierarchical basis, 2) Extra-organisational nodes that are often transnational, and 3) Shared norms and values that govern organisational functioning rather than formal decrees. **As “netwarriors”, criminal organisations, extremist groups, and gangs pose an unconventional threat to nation-states, especially if they are converging in networks. A brief description of how organised crime groups and terrorist organisations have evolved will show the modern comparability in structure between these groups...”**⁵⁸

→ **Fifth Generation Warfare (5GW):**

- a. 5GW involves “conflict between identity-based groups, which broadly includes cultural, social, economic conflict. This can be seen as warfare designed to end democracy. It is not aimed at the state, but is focused on the erosion of state institutions, and weakening the bonds that hold states together.”⁵⁹

- b. US Army Major Shannon quoted in Wired (magazine) in 2009 describes 5GW as “a vortex of violence, a free-for-all of surprise destruction motivated more by frustration than by any coherent plans for the future.” The article by David Axe continues: “5GW is what happens when the world’s disaffected direct their desperation at the most obvious symbol of everything they lack.”⁶⁰

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- c. “[T]he fifth-gen fighters' weapon of choice is political "stalemate," contends Marine Lt. Col. Stanton Coerr, in a new piece in Marine Corps Gazette. "5GW fighters will win by ... point[ing] out the impotence of secular military might. ...”⁶¹
- d. “These fighters win by not losing, while we lose by not winning. 5GW is... espoused by [the likes of] al Qaeda.... But that doesn't mean that fifth-gen warriors necessarily are clearly ideological with aspirations of setting up alternative political systems ... they’re opportunists, intent only on destruction. But even pointless violence can have a perverse logic, for the sudden, irrational destruction undermines the idea that nations ... are viable in the modern world. ...Information warfare to accomplish strategic, operational and tactical objectives without doing any measurable damage which target can identify is an important aspect of 5GW where the target may not even know it has been attacked and that the adversary has already won.”⁶²
- e. “The classical view of warfare was characterised as one State battling another; the advent of the 4th generation warfare concept saw acknowledgment of asymmetric threats posed by non-state entities. In 5GW, the two entities of state and non-state actors remain, however, it is the concept of warfare itself that becomes indistinct. Contemporary adversaries will seek to operate in the ‘grey zone’, an indistinguishable space between peacetime and conflict. The boundaries between democratic debate, activism and terrorism, criminality and warfare will themselves become contested.”⁶³

→ **Case Study: Organized Crime as a Tool of Statecraft and War** (excerpts from “Hybrid War Asset: Gangsters”⁶⁴ by Mark Galeotti in Foreign Policy June 12, 2017)

- a. **North Korea:** “North Korea has led the way in turning organized crime toward state ends. Its infamous Bureau 39 is essentially the government’s mafia office, dedicated to generating resources by illegal means to support the state (especially its nuclear program) and keep the Kims in imported luxuries⁶⁵. It arranges for methamphetamines⁶⁶ to be brewed inside government chemical works, the state mint helps produce some of the highest-quality counterfeit bank notes⁶⁷ in the world, and the state-owned Korea National Insurance Corp. (KNIC) runs systematic insurance frauds abroad.⁶⁸

Thae Yong-ho, a former diplomat who was the highest-ranking defector in 20 years, claimed in 2017⁶⁹ that these schemes earn Pyongyang “tens of millions of dollars” annually. (In 2009, KNIC managers in Singapore reportedly sent then-leader Kim Jong Il \$20 million in cash as a birthday present.⁷⁰) Turning to

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cybercrime has been a logical step. Cheap, potentially lucrative, and not relying on physical contact, cybercrime is the ideal operation for an impoverished and isolated pariah. Other states committed to challenging the international order are learning from Pyongyang’s example, though — if with a little more subtlety. Unlike the North Koreans, they are typically cutting deals with the underworld rather than simply moving into it themselves. Gangsters, after all, have all kinds of skills and capacities that can be of value to intelligence agencies and covert operations in the modern world, whether moving goods or people untraceably across borders, raising funds for political purposes, or simply putting a bullet into an inconvenient enemy of the state.”

- b. **Sicilian Mafia and Pakistan:** “Of course, intelligence agencies have long used criminals as proxies from time to time. The Sicilian Mafia⁷¹ provided local knowledge and muscle for the Americans before the Allied invasion of Sicily in 1943. In the 1990s, Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence agency used the D-Company⁷² criminal organization to launch terror attacks in India.”
- c. **Turkey, China, Iran, Mexican Cartels:** “In the main, though, these connections tended to be quite rare, one-off necessities more than actual policy. After all, criminals are essentially self-interested and intrinsically untrustworthy. Increasingly, though, states are turning to this on a more regular basis. The Turkish security forces have used rival heroin-smuggling gangs as weapons⁷³ against the Kurdistan Workers’ Party to penetrate Turkish expatriate communities, for example. Chinese triads are being used by Beijing’s Public Security Bureau to intimidate protesters⁷⁴ and gather intelligence abroad. And when the Iranian Revolutionary Guard wanted to kill the Saudi ambassador⁷⁵ to the United States in 2011, they used someone they thought was a Mexican drug cartel hit man. (He was actually an agent for the Drug Enforcement Administration.)”
- d. **Russia:** “However, as they look to prosecute their “political war”⁷⁶ against the West, the Russians are emerging as the most enthusiastic users of gangsters’ services. Given that their intelligence services are now up to Cold War levels, it seems ironic that they would even need such amateur auxiliaries. However, so

ambitious and numerous are their operations that even they sometimes need some extra capacity or deniability.

Russia's seizure of Crimea, for example, and the subsequent undeclared war in Ukraine's Donbass region were carried out not just by Russian special forces, but by local gangsters serving as so-called self-defense volunteers. Similarly, many Russian cyberattacks, especially large-scale ones, involve mobilizing criminal hackers. (Indeed, the cyberespionage division of the Federal Security Service has actually recruited hackers⁷⁷ by giving them the choice of prison or service.)

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But most of this state-sponsored organized crime is more low-profile. We are seeing more and more cases, especially in Europe, where local counterintelligence services believe gangsters are acting as occasional Russian assets. Some work on behalf of the Russia state willingly. In other cases, these criminals have been turned into assets without their knowledge, thinking they are simply doing a service for a Russian gang. And yet for others, they are made an offer they can't refuse. In a recent report⁷⁸ for the European Council on Foreign Relations, I call these "Russian-based organized crime" — whether ethnically Russian or not (because many are Georgians or the like), they are criminals with business or personal interests back in Russia, a fact the Kremlin can use as leverage.

To be sure, most of the time direct links between criminals and the Russian state are hard to establish. What good would it be to hire them if they weren't? But in some cases, the politically convenient patterns are plain to see. In Istanbul, Russian gangsters have killed Chechen rebel supporters, according to Turkish intelligence. In Ukraine, only a few days ago, a Chechen gangster tried to kill an anti-Russian militia commander.

In the Czech Republic, the authorities warn⁷⁹ of the links between Russian intelligence and questionable businesses involved in corruption and money laundering. In Finland, the security police suspect Russian criminals are buying up strategically placed properties⁸⁰ from which military facilities can be monitored or even attacked.

Criminal hackers — those not recruited⁸¹ straight into the intelligence services — are being used for both targeted information heists and crude cyberattacks. Putin has even hinted⁸², with a nod and a wink, that such "patriotically minded" cybercriminals may have been behind the Democratic National Committee hack.

The use of criminals on the part of the Russian government even seemingly leads to the provocative cross-border raid into Estonia by Federal Security Service (FSB) commandos in 2014, during which they snatched Estonian security officer Eston Kohver. He was convicted on trumped-up espionage charges before being

swapped for a Russian spy in an Estonian prison, but the main aim appears to have been to disrupt his investigation into a cigarette-smuggling ring. The criminals were moving untaxed or counterfeit cigarettes over the frontier with the FSB's protection. In return, the Russians got a cut of their proceeds as *chernaya kassa* — “black account” — secret funds⁸³ that could be used to pay off friends or support convenient political movements without revealing Moscow's fingerprints.”

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e. **Russian Hybrid Actors and Espionage in Canada:**

“... So what's not to love? Why shouldn't everyone, Washington included, get into the gangster-spook game? Apart from the ethical issue, there is the political cost. Criminals make unreliable agents, prone to unprofessionalism in action, and an eager willingness to tell all in return for a lighter sentence when caught. Pyongyang hardly has any credibility or legitimacy to lose, but countries routinely engaging in these activities risk being considered pariahs.

Then there is the risk of blowback. While the state is working out how to use the criminals, the criminals are working out how to exploit the state. The result is often a vicious circle of further corruption and criminalization. When Canadian naval intelligence officer Sub-Lt. Jeffrey Delisle began selling secrets to the Russians, for example, he was given the shopping list of secrets that Moscow wanted. Over time, there were unexpected additions. Moscow wanted to find out what the Canadians knew about the Russian gangsters⁸⁴ operating there. The odds are this wasn't because the Kremlin itself was interested, so much as that someone in the chain of command saw an opportunity to get hold of information that could then be sold to the criminals.

But this is the age of so-called hybrid war, of the blurring of the boundaries between war and peace, overt and covert, espionage and information. And what could be more hybrid than the gangsters? Certainly for the foreseeable future they will remain assets not just in the shadow war between Russia and the West, but a range of geopolitical struggles carried out by countries that are looking to outsource operations from espionage to sabotage to these deniable mercenaries of the underworld.”

8. COVID-19 factors effecting behaviours of the Crime-Terror Nexus and its relationships with Upperworld society

Europol: A Europol report⁸⁵ outlines some of the key factors currently prompting changes in the behaviours of the crime-terror nexus, at times by impeding certain activities at least temporarily until adjustments are made or by opening up new vistas of opportunity. These factors include:

- a. Decreased mobility and flow of people across borders
- b. Limitations in public life
- c. Decreased supplies of certain illicit goods
- d. Increased public anxiety creating vulnerability for exploitations
- e. High demand for certain goods
- f. Citizens at home increasingly tied to digital solutions

9. Summary: COVID-19 – a watershed moment in the changing face of criminal justice and the role of the state

- “Before the crisis, geopolitical and national security concerns included ongoing protracted conflicts (shaped by illicit flows of resources, money and weapons); cities plagued by serious levels of gang violence; and criminal capture of institutions and state bodies. Now the crisis is upon us, none of these issues have gone away: instead, it is likely that the global response to this crisis may in some ways be shaped, subverted or hindered by an infiltration of criminal interests.”⁸⁶
- “The fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic ... will also influence and shape organized crime and illicit markets. The institutional response to the pandemic and the consequent reshaping of socio-economic norms worldwide will affect how

criminal networks operate, as well as the nature of law-enforcement responses to them.... COVID-19 will become a watershed moment in the changing face of criminal justice and the role of the state; the support provided by governments and international organizations to vulnerable communities; and the dynamics of the global criminal economy....”⁸⁷

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Preface

COVID-19 and the Mafia-Jihadist Nexus in Italy

Officials say a coordinated effort by European nations is needed to push back against organized crime. But with leaders’ attention focused on the COVID-19 pandemic, “organized crime is not among the [European] Commission priorities.”⁸⁸

Sabrina Pignedoli, an MEP from Italy’s 5Star Movement

1. Introduction

Organized Crime/Mafia – The Challenge of Definition

(selected quotes from “From Mafia to Organized Crime”⁸⁹ by Anna Sergi)

a. “When national law, especially criminal law, attempts to portray the reality of mafias and/or organised crime – the real nature of their offending – with the purpose to contain/fight/disrupt them (i.e. policing them) it has to deal with the challenges of multi-dimension and multifaceted labels, stereotypes and evolving perceptions of threats, which are constructed as global, local and *glocal* (Hobbs, 1998).”⁹⁰

b. “Today “organised crime” is a peculiar concept that has derived its fortune in the Western world from the Hollywood images of real or fake mafia bosses and their families, and has in time become the legitimate, apparently neutral, word to

encompass both mafia and other forms of more or less formally organised criminality. The neutrality of “organised crime” is, however, a myth.”⁹¹

c. “In academic literature, however, the discussion about what is mafia and whether or not it is an independent typology of crime or a manifestation of organised crime, is still on-going, also on the Italian side.”⁹²

d. “In brief, there has been an overlapping of the two concepts, when not a forced application of mafia traits on non-mafia manifestations altogether. This overlapping, which might not be problematic on a common-sense level, might indeed have repercussions on the way these phenomena are interpreted for repression and

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prevention of harmful conducts from a legal perspective. We need to always remember that the criminalisation of these notions changes the notions themselves.”⁹³

e. “When we talk about organised crime and mafia the first important distinction to make is a terminological one. There is in fact a clear but often overlooked difference between the two concepts, which lies in their identification as crimes. Organised crime is a crime, a criminal category, a set of crimes or a list of crimes – whichever works best in national settings. Mafias instead are phenomena – social, criminal, economic ones, depending on the territory of reference. Mafias can be and are criminalised, at least in part, in many countries, but what states have criminalised are components of the mafia phenomenon, at times mafia behaviours, more often mafia activities or, like in Italy, mafia groups.”⁹⁴

f. “For the purposes of this book, however, the dangerousness of organised crime groups is considered primarily a criminal and criminalised trait, while the dangerousness of mafias is more nuanced and usually both criminal and cultural. In other words, organised crime groups are dangerous as they engage in activities, which are crimes or lead to crimes having financial gains or other material benefits as ultimate goals. The harm they cause in the commission of crimes might be composite and varied – as these crimes might require movements and harmful facilitating activities – but their relevance is still on the “criminal”, therefore “legally constructed” field. Mafia groups, on the other side, even though they certainly engage in activities that are constructed as crimes and related enabling or facilitating activities, do not just exist for financial or material gain. The harm they cause, especially but not only in their local communities, is both criminal and social as social are also some of their goals – power, prestige, advancement and preservation of certain anti-progressive values.”⁹⁵

2. The Organized Crime/Mafia Spectrum

a. “Obviously the difference between the two typologies is not clear-cut – far from it – which is why this book attempts to place characteristics and definers across the mafia-organised crime spectrum that is not static but dynamic.”⁹⁶

b. “Whereas it is probably impossible to define either “organised crime” and “mafia” successfully and without criticisms, it seems more profitable to disassemble the characteristics usually associated to these phenomena to understand how they are identified and set apart from each other. The two concepts at each side of the spectrum (organised crime and mafia) differ because of the basic assumptions, pre-judgements, at the basis of this book as explained in the introduction and related to the different dangerousness of mafias and organised crime groups as well as the different

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relationships with politics, socio-cultural elements and power in addition to financial gain.”⁹⁷

c. “Conceptually, mafias are best understood as “structures”, while “other” organised crime manifestations are best understood as sets of “activities”. This obviously does not mean that in some organised crime groups “structures” are not relevant or decisive, as well as it does not mean that for an understanding of mafias “activities” are not significant. We can, however, understand both phenomena by looking at what mostly differentiates them. “Organised crime” applies to a group’s capacity to both produce and trade while mafia refers to a group’s capacity to also govern (Varese, 2011). This is to say that when an organised crime group (i.e. a group exhibiting the traits described both above and below in this chapter) produces, trades and also governs, I would use the “mafia” word. Other conceptualisations, such as those related to organised crime as “criminal networks” (Morselli, 2009), with the importance of “nodes” for successful or unsuccessful activities (Hobbs, 2013; Coles, 2001), and mafia groups as more or less rational “organisations” (Dalla Chiesa, 2015), support the placement of various phenomena across a mafia-organised crime spectrum (OC-mafia or mafia-OC spectrum). For example, if a group engages in one or more criminal activities, it can be placed on the organised crime side of the spectrum, as it mirrors a phenomenon where understanding criminal activities is more appropriate than understanding structures. An analysis of the functioning of the network would be in this case functional to the understanding of the criminal activity. Conversely, if a group exhibits not only a criminal dimension but also a “will to power” (Paoli, 2008), rooted in the social and the local, then it can be placed on the mafia side of the spectrum. An analysis of criminal activities in this case would be functional to the understanding of mafia structure and its growth in power. We can essentially argue that at the two edges of the OC-mafia spectrum are complex crimes (on the OC side) and (political) power (on the mafia side).”⁹⁸

d. “The Spectrum ... represents a more synthetic version of the OC-mafia spectrum.... A group on the most extreme edge of the mafia side will be a group best defined by its structure; physical and spatial/institutional control of the territory, which leads to

residual use of violence; a specific cultural dimension; political proximity and connivance; high level of trust through more rigid recruitment strategies (e.g. bloodline); different, usually high, levels of secrecy but ensured through omertà and consensus (tacit visibility) in certain territories; poly-crime engagement and poly-territoriality based often, but not necessarily, on ethnic ties and shared cultural and linguistic heritage.

A group on the most extreme edge of the organised crime side will be a group best defined by its criminal activities; its localized narrower control of the territory which

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might lead to high levels of violence; no sociocultural ties needed or not relevant for the business; occasional infiltration/ corruption rather than connivance; lower levels of trust which implies instrumental, more flexible, recruitment strategies (e.g. opportunistic); different, possibly high, levels of secrecy based often on threats and violence (violent visibility); mono- or poly-crime engagement and poly-territoriality (if exhibited) based on opportunistic networks.”⁹⁹

3. The term “Mafia” as utilized in this memo

1. For the purposes of this memo the term Mafia refers to several major Italian Mafia-type organisations profiled in a 2013 Europol Threat Assessment¹⁰⁰: – Sicilian Mafia, Calabrian ‘Ndrangheta, Neapolitan Camorra and Apulian Organised Crime. Apulian Organised Crime is frequently and wrongly identified with the Sacra Corona Unita (SCU), which is one of its components but by no means the only one. The Società Foggiana, the Camorra Barese and the Gargano’s Mafia are other criminal clusters belonging to Apulian Organised Crime. Cosa Nostra is the oldest, most traditional and widespread manifestation of the Sicilian Mafia. Other Sicilian Mafia groups not affiliated to Cosa Nostra include the Stidda and the Cursoti and Laudani clans.

These entities represent a profound domestic, regional and globalized threat to the international community. Their extensive involvements in Canada and other countries is extensive and well documented.

3. The Italian Mafia and the Jihadist-Criminal Nexus – Selected Examples

- **The Mafi and Jihadist Terror – Partnership not Competition:** “... Rather than competing, Italian mafias and Islamic terrorist groups, from Al-Qa’ida to Daesh, cooperate. ...Across Europe, organised-crime groups and terrorists are not business competitors, but rather partners, co-managing arms trafficking, drug

trafficking, human trafficking, extortion, kidnapping and smuggling of illicit goods, like cigarettes, archaeological relics and art.”¹⁰¹

“...Italy, located in the very centre of the Mediterranean, is obviously a main hub, thanks to its well established and influential mafia groups: Sicilian Cosa Nostra, Calabria’s ‘Ndrangheta, Neapolitan Camorra and Apulian Sacra Corona Unita. At any rate, this criminal partnership is an international network: from Cechenian Obishna, to the Mexican and Colombian drug cartels, actors from all over the world are playing the game.”¹⁰²

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- **“The pivotal actor is Italy, due to its central geopolitical location and the straight relational-political nature of its gangs”:** “In a moment in which States are replaced by mega-cities competing over connectivity more than borders, as to quote Parag Khanna, the most networked criminal gangs will win. However, the pivotal actor is Italy, due to its central geopolitical location and the straight relational-political nature of its gangs. In fact, the foremost criminal affinity between jihadists and Italian mafia groups lies in the political role the latter have always played. As jihadists aim at establishing new States, like ISIS - but also other lesser known entities such as the Caucasus Emirate -, so Italian Mafias have always done.”¹⁰³
- **“Mafia groups, especially Neapolitan camorra, provide vital expertise in counterfeiting documents to help migrants and also terrorists to move freely inside the EU’s Schengen area”:** “Many victims of human trafficking are enlisted in Italian mafia ranks or involved in illegal activities that fund terrorist attacks in Europe. The 2004 Madrid train bombings at the Atocha Railway Station were financed by drug smuggled at Santa Maria Capua Vetere, close to Naples, with the cooperation of Camorra. Mokhtar Belmokhtar, a key leader of AQUIM - Al Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb - who started his career in Afghan and Algerian civil wars, is nicknamed Mr. Marlboro, due to his main funding activity, yet has been involved into different turmoils associated with “liberation” movements and separatism.”¹⁰⁴
- **The Mafia and Extreme Right and Left:** “There is some evidence that this tactical alliance between mafia and jihadists might include also subversive extremists leftist and rightist groups, in Europe, which are sympathetic with the antiliberal and anti capitalist stance of Salafi terrorists.”¹⁰⁵
- **The Mafia and ISIS – Trading in Weapons and Antiquities:** “Links have been established for the trafficking of antiquities from the Middle East and North Africa

into Europe. An investigation by the Turin-based newspaper La Stampa in 2016 found the Italian Mafia had been purchasing weapons from Moldova and the Ukraine, with help from the Russian Mafia, and transporting these from the southern Italian city of Calabria to the then IS-controlled Libyan city of Sirte. In exchange for the weapons, IS would allegedly ship back artefacts seized from historic sites and tombs in Libya. The undercover journalist researching the story was offered to buy a Roman-era marble bust for €60,000. Citing an unnamed French security official, the Wall Street Journal reported in August 2017 that IS makes roughly \$100 million per year from selling artefacts pilfered from Iraq and Syria.”¹⁰⁶

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- **Mafia, Narcotics, al-Qaeda and ISIS:** “...[F]or example, the ‘Ndrangheta and Camorra clans smuggle arms to Al-Qa’ida militants in exchange for drugs to sell on the national market. Although it is true that local mafias control illicit trafficking within the Italian territory, the same can be said of Daesh cells operating in the Middle East and North Africa, especially in Libya. Instead of being an obstacle, territorial control provides an effective and efficient division of responsibilities along trafficking routes.”¹⁰⁷
- **The Mafia and Boko Haram** – Americans may love their fentanyl... But terrorists apparently prefer tramadol, a cheaper numbing opioid that is legal in the Middle East. And they are getting plenty of it on the black market thanks to Italian ‘Ndrangheta mobsters, according to Italy’s financial police. In the last year alone, the cops have confiscated nearly 100 million tramadol tablets meant for ISIS operatives in Libya. Once in Libya, the pills are used to pump up fighters there, or they’re smuggled into Egypt and Syria, or they are sold to Boko Haram fighters in Nigeria, according to Marta Sarafini, whose recent exposé in the Italian daily Corriere della Sera unravels the tramadol trade. “They end up in the hands of the desperate in Gaza, the prostitutes in Amman, and child laborers in Turkey,” she says. “They are the drug for anyone who wants to escape misery.”¹⁰⁸
- **ISIS lauds the Mafia:** “In a 100-page ISIS propaganda e-book titled Black flags from Rome, the Mafia support is presented as key to ISIS penetration in Italy. “The Mafia has a strong presence in Italy. The Mafia has the strongest militia and takes advantage of the Italian government’s weakness. Beside this, the Mafia has access to the drug and weapons’ black market,” page 79 of the e-book reads.”¹⁰⁹
- **The Mafia and Surface to Air Missiles Sold to ISIS:** “Italy’s counter-terrorism and organised crime Head Franco Roberti said in 2016 that IS and the Italian Mafia were working together to smuggle Moroccan-origin hashish from the Libyan coast into Southern Europe. Contraband has also travelled in the opposite direction: in May 2017, an Italian couple with alleged ties to the infamous

Camorra crime clan in Naples were arrested and charged with attempting to traffic Soviet-era weapons, including anti-tank and surface-to-air missiles to the Islamic State in Libya, as well as arms from a large arms cache to Iran.”¹¹⁰

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The Italian Mafia and COVID-19

Quote-Unquote

“The Mafia is like the coronavirus – it will get you wherever you are.”¹¹¹

Sergio Nazzero, spokesperson for Italy’s Anti-mafia parliamentary commission

“The mafias know what you have, and will need, and they give it, and will give it, on their own terms.”¹¹²

“The market sectors the Italian mafia organisations control are expanding with the pandemic,…”¹¹³

“The mafias will triple their profits from all this, because the sectors in which they have invested, and which they now control in many areas, are growing.”¹¹⁴

Italian anti-mafia author and expert Roberto Saviano

"A den of Mafia jackals are ready to exploit the desperation of the new poor from coronavirus We cannot underestimate the risk of an alliance cemented by despair."¹¹⁵

Mayor of the Sicilian city of Palermo, Leoluca Orlando

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Earlier this month, Pope Francis prayed for "people who during this time of the pandemic, trade at the expense of the needy and profit from the needs of others, like the Mafia, usurers and others."¹¹⁶

CNN

"When you're hungry you look for bread and you don't ask from which oven it comes or who gives it to you; when you need a medicine you buy it and you don't ask yourself who the seller is. Only in times of peace and prosperity you do have a choice".¹¹⁷

Mafia expert Roberto Saviano in "*La Repubblica*"

"What we are seeing – and will see more and more as the economic and social crisis unfolds – is Mafia groups returning to their core businesses of protection and governance."¹¹⁸

Zora Hauser, a researcher into organized crime at Oxford University

"I would say the Cosa Nostra are strengthening their control through welfare assistance to families who are in jail, and now this is spreading to all poor families. They want to show themselves as an alternative to the state."¹¹⁹

Salvo Palazzolo, a journalist with La Repubblica newspaper

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"The mafia has always moved faster than any government on earth... "We work with the tools of democracy; they work with the tools of violence. We talk, they shoot, we vote, they have guns. So of course, there is a need to rush, our economic help has to move faster than the mafia's...."¹²⁰

Sergio Nazzaro former spokesman for the Anti-Mafia Parliamentary Commission, currently spokesman for the Italian Deputy Minister of Health for the duration of the COVID-19 crisis.

This is "a method to create allegiance. If we – the state – don't show ourselves to be efficient, what could happen is that the Mafia presents itself as a winning a model, and maybe asks for a return favor at the elections."¹²¹

Nicola Gratteri, anti-Mafia investigator and head of public prosecutor's office in Catanzaro

"One dollar spent now in donations brings about greater loyalty and gratitude than dollar spent in peaceful times."¹²²

"There have also been reports of mafia charity
in Brazil, South Africa and Japan"¹²³

Newsweek

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1. The Italian Mafia and COVID-19 – Select Examples

Supplanting the State – Controlling COVID-19-related industries

"Just look at the portfolio of the mafia..."



"Just look at the portfolio of the mafias, to see how much they can earn from this pandemic," Italian anti-mafia author Roberto Saviano told the *Repubblica* newspaper.... "Where have they invested over the last few decades? Multi-service companies [canteens, cleaning, disinfection], waste recycling, transportation, funeral homes, oil and food distribution. That's how they'll make money."¹²⁴ Franco Gabrielli, head of the Italian police, noted that Mafia organizations are already deeply enmeshed in parts of the economy "that have not been blocked by the restrictions of Covid-19: the agriculture-food chain, the supply of medicines and medical equipment, road transport."¹²⁵

"Music to the Mafia's Ears"



“Italian experts say about 65 per cent of Italian small and medium-sized businesses are at risk of bankruptcy. That is music to the ears of the country's mobs, who use extortion and usury to feast on ailing businesses.”¹²⁶ Organized Crime expert Roberto Saviano believes liquidity will be “the center of everything” in the aftermath of the coronavirus crisis. “The organization will come to a company in crisis and say: ‘We don't buy everything, but we will give you cash in exchange for shares – to become part of your company,’” he said. “This is what they will do with everyone.”¹²⁷

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The Mafia: “The real money will be made when the lockdown ends”



Franco Gabrielli, is head of the Public Security for Italy's Central Anti-Crime Directorate, or DAC:

“The real money will be made when the lockdown ends ... that the current crisis will be “the bearer of a liquidity deficit, of a profound restructuring of the labor market, of the consequent influx of huge national and EU public funding.” Gabrielli said this week that the criminal groups will be able to easily recruit cash-strapped entrepreneurs who need loans to help restart the Italian economy. Those loans will be hard to secure from banks, which will take a huge hit during the economic downfall the pandemic has already caused in Italy.¹²⁸ “The mafia offers a loan to a business owner who needs money. He knows who he is dealing with but thinks he can manage the situation. He is mistaken,” Maurizio De Lucia, Messina’s chief prosecutor, told Politico. By infiltrating legitimate businesses, mafia groups have indirect access to the business owner’s relationship with the banks and his books, De Lucia said.¹²⁹

2. The Mafia: Targeting Italy’s Unemployed

Italy's economy was already in serious difficulty before the pandemic; it is now in even worse condition. The Financial Times, citing various sources, predicts Italy could enter its fourth recession in a decade.¹³⁰ Millions of Italians are unemployed. The crisis provides the Mafia with opportunity. According to organized crime expert Robert Saviano the Mafia will try to hire the "new unemployed" as its foot soldiers.¹³¹ The environment is already ripe for Mafia head-hunters. As many as three million Italians work "off the books", according to multiple surveys. A third of the most vulnerable off the books workers live in southern Italy where the mafia's power is most entrenched.¹³² One survey by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development in 2017 estimated that a quarter of Italians in their early 20s were neither in employment, nor in education or training.¹³³

3. The Italian Mafia: Targeting Billions in Government Stimulus Funds

The Mafia is "providing everyday necessities in poor neighborhoods, offering credit to businesses on the verge of bankruptcy and planning to siphon off a chunk of the billions of euros being lined up in stimulus funds."¹³⁴

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4. Criminal Generosity:

Distributing Food and Recruiting through COVID-19¹³⁵

"One dollar spent now in donations brings about greater loyalty and gratitude than dollar spent in peaceful times."

- **Distributing food and clothing:** "Signs of growing tensions in Italy last week prompted the interior minister ... to request greater police attention to "riots by groups of extremists." His warning was aimed at the mafia, which has capitalized on the pandemic by distributing food, clothing, and money to underprivileged families in lockdown and stoking the tensions"
- **"Gifts to be are favors to be paid back":** "They act with the interest of the organization at heart and never do anything just for benefit of the community," Federico Varese, a professor of criminology at the University of Oxford and a senior research fellow at Nuffield College, told Newsweek. "Their gifts are favors to be paid back at some later time."
- **Mafia promoting "unity":** "In recent weeks, videos and local news reports have emerged in which known mafia affiliates have called for parts of Italy's south to rally together. "I appeal to my neighborhood, I need everyone's help, a small sum, to do the shopping for needy children,' Giuseppe Cusimano, who distributed food to three neighborhoods in Palermo, wrote on Facebook.

Cusimano, who was distributing food in Palermo, has been investigated by authorities for his ties to mobsters “I don't ask for much, five euros per person. For medicine, diapers, and baby products. Who has a heart contact me in private. At least let's talk well about the neighborhood. The state does not want us to do charity because we are Mafiosi.”

- **“Social consensus is a part of [the mafia's] expansion plan”:** “Federico Cafiero De Raho, the national anti-mafia prosecutor, cautioned that "social consensus is a part of [the mafia's] expansion plan." De Raho ... said that Camorra clans were distributing food to cash-strapped families under quarantine and offering loans whose payments may one day only be paid through working for the mafia.”
- **Boosting reputation as “bona fide protectors”:** “Diego Gambetta told Newsweek that the publicized “helping of the weak” is meant to boost the reputation of criminal enterprises as “bona fide protectors”. “Handouts show that in times of need they assist those who have supported them in the past as well be instrumental in opening 'lines of credit' for future services.” “One dollar spent now in donations brings about greater loyalty and gratitude than dollar spent in peaceful times.”

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5. The Italian Mafia, Narcotics and COVID-19

The Mafia helps hoarders stock up ... on narcotics

*“Marijuana and heroin are the most consumed drugs during
a time of collective anxiety”*

“Before lockdown measures were introduced in early March, mafia-linked drug dealers were able to sell their old stock at high prices.... “As the crisis started, they were able to sell every type of drug, even their old loaf, at higher than average prices as people stocked up,” Saviano says. “Marijuana and heroin are the most consumed drugs during a time of collective anxiety.”¹³⁶

The Mafia – planning for post-corona boom in cocaine

“...However, cocaine will be more in demand once the crisis is over. “The lack of checks at the ports during the pandemic means cocaine will be able to travel more easily. The movement of cocaine will be at the highest levels ever.”¹³⁷

The Mafia – “pizza delivery” during the lockdown

“Mafia-linked drug dealers are already dodging the strict limits of movements placed on Italians by posing as pizza drivers, says Nicola Gratteri, the national anti-mafia prosecutor. “The retail of cocaine is slower, because the cities are under quarantine, but now drug dealers in Italian cities dress up as delivery food riders and deliver drugs to their homes,” he says.¹³⁸

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6. Undermining the Italian Justice System Under Covid-19



COVID-19 brings trials of “hundreds of [Italian mafioso] to a halt”

Giuseppe Pignatone, a former mafia hunter in Reggio Calabria, said the pandemic would “inevitably make the judiciary’s job more difficult over the coming weeks and years”. The trials of hundreds of people have ground to a halt. The redirection of police resources due to the crisis could also contribute to the mafia blossoming, as officers “already weighed down by new roles may have to face public order problems”, Mr. Pignatone said.¹³⁹

Mafia orchestrates revolts in jails across Italy after outbreak of COVID-19

“Italy Prison in Flames, Dozens Escape in Coronavirus Riot”

→ Crime experts say mobsters orchestrated revolts in jails across the country after the outbreak, with prisoners demanding early release over fears they would become infected in overcrowded prisons. ...“Very worryingly, some with lighter sentences are being allowed out,” Nicola Gratteri, a leading prosecutor in Calabria, said.¹⁴⁰ ...

→ more than 2,500 prisoners had been released since February 29 to ease overcrowding. “People linked to the 'Ndrangheta have already been released and put under house arrest,” he said. “That presents a real danger.”¹⁴¹ Six prisoners died as riots spread ... over measures imposed to contain the coronavirus. ... violence that started at the heart of the coronavirus outbreak in northern Italy had spread south, hitting more than 25 penitentiaries nationwide.¹⁴² ...

→ On Sicily, inmates rebelled at Palermo's Ucciardone prison, which houses some Mafia convicts, but guards managed to regain control, officials said. SkyTG 24 television said about 50 inmates managed to escape from a jail¹⁴³

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7. The Italian Mafia is thriving

but “covid-19 puts the screws to New York’s mafia”¹⁴⁴

The New York mafia is taking a hit from the novel coronavirus pandemic after many of its money-making outlets have been shuttered.



Gambling halls, sporting events, and construction projects have long fed the Empire State gangs, but now that they are taking an “historic” blow, a law-enforcement source told the New York Post.

The American mafia families are also losing out on the extortion racket.... A halt to non-essential construction jobs, which includes transportation and port entry, has also put a dent in the U.S. mob’s profits.

The New York gangs ... are reportedly considering a return to the narcotics trade, which has been sidelined in recent years for more lucrative rackets, ... though it remained to be seen just how the mob could get back into the racket without risking their lives to the virus.



For decades, anti-mafia fighters from Bobby Kennedy and Rudy Giuliani to Lt. Joseph Petrosino, who was killed by the Cosa Nostra Black Hand racket in 1909, tried to achieve exactly what the coronavirus pandemic has done in just a few short weeks. The *Post's* police source summed it up, "This is doing what they couldn't do."

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8. Covid-19, Curfews, and Organized Crime

Cigarette busts Italian Mafia leader breaching Covid-19 lockdown.¹⁴⁵



Cesare Antonio Cordi, 42, boss of the bloody Cordi clan who are behind several murders as well as controlling prostitution and drug rackets was nabbed by police.... Officers had spotted Cordi puffing on a cigarette in the early hours as he wandered along the street with shopping bags at Bruzzano Zeffirio near Locri. The area is home to the infamous organised crime gang of the 'ndrangheta who are more ruthless ... than their Sicilian counterparts. Police stopped him to ask why he was breaching the lockdown measures brought in to combat covid-19 and were stunned when they discovered who he was. A police spokesman in Locri said: "Cordi was spotted in the early hours by a patrol making sure the stay at home

decree was being followed.” ... “When they questioned him they recognised him immediately and they called back up and he was arrested with the help of colleagues.”

**Italian syndicates use influence to enforce quarantine protocols
– possibly for “personal reasons”**

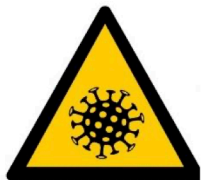
“She added that criminal organizations might also use their influence on local communities to help contain the spread of the coronavirus, even working with authorities to ensure residents follow quarantine protocols. Sergi suggested that crime bosses may have personal reasons for enforcing quarantine in their fiefdoms: many of them are senior citizens, the demographic most likely to die from the virus.”

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Rio de Janeiro Drug Gangs:

“We are imposing a curfew because nobody is taking [coronavirus] seriously.... The message has been given.”

“The traffickers are doing this because the government is absent.”



Drug traffickers in one of Rio de Janeiro’s best-known favelas have imposed a coronavirus curfew, amid growing fears over the impact the virus could have on some of Brazil’s poorest citizens.... Gang members have been circulating in the Cidade de Deus (City of God) favela in western Rio ordering residents to remain indoors after 8pm. And in an apparent attempt to prevent further infections the Red Command gang leaders who control the favela have ordered residents to stay at home.

A video apparently recorded in the City of God circulated on social media this week showing a loudspeaker broadcasting the alert: “Anyone found messing or walking around outside will be punished.” “The traffickers are doing this because the government is absent. The authorities are blind to us,” one resident told the Guardian.

Rio traffickers handing out soap:

In Santa Marta, a favela that sits in the shadow of Rio’s Christ the Redeemer statue, traffickers have been handing out soap and have placed signs near a public water fountain at the community’s entrance that say: “Please wash your hands before entering the favela.”

“I think they wrote this for the addicts who come here to buy drugs, so they don’t bring the virus in,” one local said. “But it won’t work. People who live right up at the top of the [hilltop] favela sometimes go two weeks without running water. If people aren’t even able to feed themselves, how are they supposed to stay clean?”

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Other Rio gangs enforce social distancing:

In the Morro dos Prazeres, gang members have told residents only circulate in groups of two while in Rocinha, one of Latin America’s biggest favelas, traffickers have also decreed a curfew. “...After 8.30pm everybody must stay indoors and if they don’t there will be reprisals,” said a street hawker who lives there.

Rio gangs near airport enforce closures of businesses:

Meanwhile, in some sections of the Complexo da Maré, a sprawling favela near Rio’s international airport, traffickers have told shops and churches to reduce their operating hours. “Only the bakery stays open until later – until 11pm,” said one

mother “Nobody wants to go outside – first of all for fear of coronavirus and now because of this order.”

Curfews spoke to the Brazil’s “longstanding neglect of such areas”

Edmund Ruge, a Rio-based editor for the RioOnWatch news site which covers the favelas, said the imposition of curfews in some areas spoke to the Brazilian state’s longstanding neglect of such areas, which often lack even basic sanitation.

The Rio Underworld – in their own words”

“Attention all residents...! Curfew from 8 pm...Whoever is seen on the street after this time will learn to respect the next one,” a message allegedly read while another stated that: “We want the best for the population. If the government does not have the capacity to fix it, organised crime will solve it”¹⁴⁶

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Endnotes

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