



CONFRONTING CRIMINAL/TERRORIST THREATS The Reshaping of Non-State Actors

The High-Level Conference was organised by the **NATO Defense College Foundation**, in co-operation with the **NATO Science for Peace and Security Programme**, the **Policy Center for the New South** and the **NATO Defense College**. It took place on **Monday, 9th of December 2019**, in **Rome**, at the [Sala della Protomoteca, Musei Capitolini, Campidoglio](#), gathering 16 speakers, more than 200 participants and over 20 journalists.

Structured into three sessions, the event aimed at discussing how transnational jihadist networks' strategies and structures have evolved since the territorial defeat of the Islamic Caliphate. Panellists mapped out the new emerging threats international and national security providers will have to counter: from intersections between terrorist and criminal networks to new illegal business models; from new battlefields and hotbeds of radicalisation to terrorists' sources of revenues and financing. The debate then focussed on outlining concrete measures to tackle jihadi propaganda, online illicit trade and violent extremism in active conflict zones.

Alessandro Minuto-Rizzo - *President, NATO Defense College Foundation, Rome*

“In recent years we have witnessed an evolution of the concept of security that is enlarging with the passing of time. In the same way actors are also changing. [...] Non-state actors of various kinds are showing a different reality, groups and sometimes also individuals, active and often dangerous. [...] We are experiencing the emergence of a new generation of terrorism after the time of Al Qaeda and the fight against the Islamic State. This new set of risks is following social trends which are the product of a more globalised world.”

Stefano Silvestri - *Vice President, NATO Defense College Foundation, Rome*

“The military victory over the so-called Caliphate has not ended the threat. The war on terror has had some successes, but its end is not in sight. [...] Counter-terrorism should prioritise investigations into the black economy and try to put greater pressure on organised crime to weaken its nexus with terrorist organisations and deprive them of self-financing means.”

Fernando Reinares - *Director, Violent Radicalisation and Global Terrorism Programme, Elcano Royal Institute, Madrid*

“The Islamic State has been able to prompt an extraordinary jihadist mobilisation since 2013, especially in Western Europe. Young Muslims (18-25 years) residing there are 20 times overrepresented by foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq if confronted with foreign fighters coming from the rest of the world. [...] Salafism often teaches that Western values and democracies are *haram*. In Europe, we do have a correlation between a high presence of Salafi preachers and a high level of radicalisation and foreign fighters.”

Louise Shelley - *Director, Terrorism, Transnational Crime and Corruption Center / University Professor, Schar School of Policy and Government, George Mason University, Fairfax*

“Just to give you a dimension of transnational crime networks, a recently prosecuted case in the United States revealed a Chinese trafficking network, operating in numerous countries such as the USA and Australia. 40.000 customers had bought goods from it. Transnational crime in the cyber world can operate more anonymously, speeding up the delivery of products and being mainly perpetrated by networks rather than rigid organisations. Moreover, it is carried out both by state and non-state actors, and it traffics in intangible goods such as malware, ransomware, botnets and intellectual property.”

Jeffrey Hardy - *Director-General, Transnational Alliance to Combat Illicit Trade, New York*

“What role does illicit trade play in funding terrorist organisations? Illicit trade has a direct impact on a country's GDP because tax revenues are drained from economies. They have a relatively more severe impact on developing countries. Illegal economies thus help to fund criminal and terrorist activities, fostering corruption and undermining the rule of law.”

Filippo Musca - *General Director, The Siracusa International Institute for Criminal Justice and Human Rights, Siracusa*

“The more fragile a state is, the greater the chance for a criminal or terrorist group to gain influence. Terrorist groups are adapting to criminal groups, modifying structures and *modus operandi*. Counter-terrorism activities must address the causes that generated the phenomenon and be proactive, considering the push and pull factors that drive these groups. Poverty and lack of opportunities are among the main factors that can drive to radicalisation. That is why one has to analyse the social and political context in which these organisations rise.”

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