



Al Arabiya News Channel



NATO Foundation
Defense College



High-level Conference “Targeting the de-materialised ‘Caliphate’
Extremism, radicalisation and illegal trafficking”
Centro Congressi Roma Eventi - Piazza di Spagna, Via Alibert 5/a, Rome

6th of December 2018

Targeting the de-materialised “Caliphate” - Extremism, Radicalisation and Illegal Trafficking

The High-Level Conference was organised by the NATO Defense College Foundation in co-operation with the NATO Defense College. It took place in Rome at the *Centro Congressi Roma Eventi - Piazza di Spagna, Via Alibert 5/a*, on the 6th of December 2018.

Alessandro Minuto-Rizzo (President of the NATO Defense College Foundation) opened the event highlighting the need of an interdisciplinary approach in tackling threats that are nowadays, more than ever, interconnected: violent extremism, radicalisation, jihadist propaganda, organised crime and illicit trade. Furthermore, it should be taken into account also that the unprecedented increase of non-state actors on the international relations’ chessboard is undermining the established good governance practices.

The participation of more than 180 people, together with the ground-breaking interventions of the fifteen speakers, contributed to the event’s great success: through an in-depth analysis of the current reality of the terrorist networks worldwide and their ties with illicit trade funds, the debate provided new insights for the research and the concrete measures against terrorism and the phenomena of organised crime, as well as up-to-date guidelines for de-radicalisation policies.

According to **Peter Neumann** (Director of the *International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation* at King’s College), a future trend to monitor will be the “returnee threat”: it is unpredictable how the return of more than 3.000 foreign fighters to Europe will play out. Statistics say that 30% have already come back, 20% have died and the rest may return later; among them, some want to disengage, while the others still remain a threat. Current prevention policies are still effective, and yet, at the same time, they must be re-oriented towards this new trend, which could lead to the potential emergence of new terroristic profiles too. The key should be focussing on networks, rather than organisations.

Louise Shelley (Director of the *Terrorism Unit* of the *Transnational Crime and Corruption Center*) claims: “Decades ago the illicit trade in antiquities was a smaller number of high value items sold through dealers. Today, the transactions are more numerous - individuals buy through websites and use various payment forms including Bitcoin and cryptocurrencies in general. [...Besides], natural resources and environmental crime are nowadays the fastest growing form of illicit trade. Terrorists have benefited as well: this is very valuable for them because it is hard to trace the provenance of oil, timber, minerals etc. Antiquities is a small part of this trade and the revenue of this is not as large as many suggest”.

However, **Ernesto Savona** (Director of *Transcrime* at Università Cattolica) pointed out the fact that, after ISIL’s territorial defeat, its financial power is still considerable. ISIL’s surviving leadership is alleged to have invested about \$400 million in legitimate businesses - hotels, hospitals, farms and car dealerships - throughout the Middle East region, including in Turkey, where some militants have also reportedly made large purchases of gold. ISIL’s financial holdings and funding model have made it the wealthiest insurgent group in history (al Qaeda’s initial capital was estimated around \$300 million). Its diversified funding portfolio and ability to raise money through criminal activities provides it with an opportunity to survive.

Alvise Giustiniani (Vice President *Illicit Trade Prevention*, Philip Morris International), representing one of our distinguished partners, focusses on the smuggling of tobacco as of one of the most lucrative illegal trades financing terroristic networks: “As highlighted today, illicit trade of tobacco products is not only a serious problem for an entire supply chain and for tax revenues of single states: it is an issue that continues to entail more dramatic connotations, becoming source of financing for organized crime and, sometimes, international terrorism, which in this activity finds a low risk and high profits scenario. As Philip Morris International we are strongly committed to fighting illegal trade and we think it is fundamental to keep a high-level attention on the topic. On a global level as in Italy, we reiterate our commitment to the utmost cooperation with law enforcement agencies and institutions responsible for fighting illegality, believing that only through a strong public-private partnership cigarette smuggling can finally come to an end”.

Should you have any further questions or requests, contact the NDCF Press and Communication Office:

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#TargetingtheCaliphate

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