



The Crime-Terror Nexus in Italy and Malta

- The objective of this working paper is to present an overview of links between crime and terrorism (the crime-terror nexus) in Italy and Malta, highlight potential risks, and make a series of recommendations for how such risks can be mitigated.
 - It is part of a Europe-wide survey that will produce similar papers for all 28 member states of the European Union. In doing so, the aim is to generate a more holistic understanding of threats from crime and terrorism, and promote new and innovative ways of tackling them.
 - Though illicit activities are notoriously difficult to measure, the presence – or notable absence – of links between crime and terrorism can be seen in two areas:
 1. Among **mafia groups in Italy**, which have not intentionally or formally collaborated with jihadist groups, but – especially through their involvement in people smuggling – may *unwittingly* facilitate the entry of jihadists into Europe;
 2. In **Italian prisons**, where there is an emerging – albeit low-level – threat of prison radicalisation and cross-fertilisation between criminal and terrorist milieus.
 - Our recommendations include action on prisons, terrorist financing, information sharing, and collaboration between security agencies as well as between government and non-government actors.
 - While Italian authorities have recognised and taken positive steps in relation to many of these concerns, the potentially most significant risk exists regarding people smuggling. Disrupting the activities of criminal groups in this area should be a priority.
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1 Introduction

Italy should be the quintessential case study of the crime-terror nexus. Organised crime groups are firmly embedded in Italian society, and jihadist networks have had a longstanding presence in the country. Its geographical proximity to North Africa also means it serves as a natural logistics hub and launching point for nearby conflict zones. Yet there is only circumstantial evidence of formative links between crime and terrorism in Italy.

The objective of this paper is to present an overview of potential links between crime and terrorism in Italy – as well as neighbouring Malta – highlight potential risks, and make a series of recommendations for how such risks can be mitigated. It is part of a Europe-wide survey that will produce similar papers for all 28 member states of the European Union. In doing so, the aim is to generate a more holistic understanding of threats from crime and terrorism, and promote new and innovative ways of tackling them.

The paper's empirical basis is a survey of open sources, including relevant government and inter-governmental reports, academic research, court documents, newspaper articles, as well as interviews with practitioners and subject matter experts. The research took place between November 2017 and January 2018, and was carried out by a team of Italian and British researchers.¹

Though illicit activities are notoriously difficult to measure and quantify, the presence – or notable absence – of links between crime and terrorism can be seen in two areas:

1. Among **mafia groups in Italy**, which have not intentionally or formally collaborated with jihadist groups, but – especially through their involvement in people smuggling – may *unwittingly* facilitate the entry of jihadists into Europe;
2. In **Italian prisons**, where there is an emerging – albeit low-level – threat of prison radicalisation and cross-fertilisation between criminal and terrorist milieus.

While both of these areas require action, and Italian authorities have recognised and taken positive steps in relation many of these concerns, the potentially most significant risk exists with regards to people smuggling. Disrupting the activities of criminal groups in this area should therefore be a priority.

¹ The authors of this report are Peter R. Neumann and Rajan Basra. We wish to thank Clarissa Spada and Mariaelena Agostini for their research support, as well as Zora Hauser and Lorenzo Vidino for reviewing earlier drafts. We are also grateful to all interviewees, whether named or anonymous.

The paper starts with overviews of organised crime and terrorism in Italy and Malta. In subsequent sections, we explore the two areas in which potential links could emerge: among Mafia groups in Italy, and in Italian prisons. The paper concludes with a series of recommendations for policymakers and security agencies.

Box 1: What is the Crime-Terror Nexus?

The concept of the crime-terror nexus emerged in the early 1990s, following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of globalisation. Amidst shifting geopolitics and the birth of the information age, analysts noticed that terrorist and insurgent groups were increasingly adapting criminal modus operandi to further their aims.

Since then, scholars have identified *three types of crime-terror nexus: institutional, organisational, and social*.

Institutional

One of the pioneers was Tamara Makarenko.² On her “crime-terror continuum”, she identified three types of institutional linkages between criminal and terrorist groups:

- At one end, criminal and terrorist groups engaged in *co-operation*, either in limited, transaction-based alliances, or in more sophisticated coalitions.
- Nearing the middle, *convergence* indicated when groups adapted skills belonging to the other, resulting in “hybrid criminal-terrorist groups”.
- At the other end was *transformation*, in which a group had completely transformed into the other by way of a shift in motivation.

Among the most prominent examples have been the Taliban, which have at times depended on Afghanistan’s heroin production; the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces’ (FARC) involvement in their country’s narcotics industry; and the smuggling of petrol and counterfeit goods by the Irish Republican Army (IRA).

Organisational

Writing at the same time as Makarenko, Letizia Paoli focused on the structural and organisational similarities between youth gangs and terrorist groups, which she categorised as “clannish” organisations:³

continues...

2 Tamara Makarenko, “The Crime-Terror Continuum: Tracing the Interplay between Transnational Organised Crime and Terrorism”, *Global Crime*, Vol 6, No 1, 2004, pp.129-145.

3 Letizia Paoli, “The Paradoxes of Organized Crime”, *Crime, Law, and Social Change*, Vol 37, No 1, 2002, pp.51-97.

- They were involved in illegal activity, including violence;
- They required members' "absolute commitment";
- They offered *emotional benefits*, such as status, "brotherhood", identity, and belonging.

In Paoli's view, drawing sharp distinctions between actors based on their stated aims – criminal versus political – could be misleading, because the distinctions might be blurred and "goals [could] change".

As an example, she cited white supremacist gangs in the United States, which recruited their membership according to ideological principles and professed to have a political programme but were heavily involved in "ordinary" crime.

Social

In a recent study of jihadist recruitment in Europe, Rajan Basra and Peter R. Neumann highlighted not the convergence of criminals and terrorists as groups or organisations but of their social networks, environments, or milieus.⁴ Rather than formalised collaboration or even transformation, they found that criminal and terrorist groups recruited from sociologically similar pools of people, creating (often unintended) synergies and overlaps.

This "new" crime-terror nexus had four facets:

- It affected processes of *radicalisation*, because involvement in terrorism could offer redemption and legitimise crime.
- It highlighted the *role of prisons* as environments for radicalisation and networking among criminals and extremists.
- It emphasised the *development of skills and experiences* that could be useful for terrorists, particularly access to weapons, forged documents, and the familiarity with violence.
- It facilitated the *financing* of terrorism, especially through petty crime.

Despite differences in approach and perspective, the *three types of nexus* – *institutional*, *organisational*, and *social* – are not mutually exclusive. Taken together, they provide the analytical framework of the Crime Terror Nexus Project.

⁴ Rajan Basra and Peter R. Neumann, "Criminal Pasts, Terrorist Futures: European Jihadists and the New Crime-Terror Nexus", *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol 10, No 6, 2016, pp.25-40.

2 Organised crime

Organised crime in Italy is a deeply entrenched and longstanding phenomenon. While its origins often involve myths and legends, the most well-known mafia groups (defined as “protection rackets aiming to be the sole supplier of protection for all transactions in a given territory”)⁵ – such as the *Camorra*, *Cosa Nostra*, *'Ndrangheta* and *Sacra Corona Unita* – emerged in the early 1800s, if not earlier.⁶ While mafia groups are inherently opaque – their structure, behaviour, and evolution are subject of continued debate – these crime groups leave a visible impression on Italy. Mafia groups have shown a capacity to evolve, expand, and endure over time.⁷

Crime continues to evolve throughout Europe, and organised crime groups remain steadfast in traditional markets such as drugs, with a willingness to enter new markets such as online gambling. This section outlines the complex issue of organised crime in Italy and Malta, looking at the groups involved, their activities, and locations.

Groups

There is a kaleidoscope of organised crime groups in Italy. While the “Mafia” has captured popular imagination throughout the world, there is more to Italian organised crime than the stereotypical *Cosa Nostra* “Godfather” image. The exact numbers of individuals and groups involved is nearly impossible to estimate – due to the complex system of clans and family groups – though the current organised crime groups can be classified into two broad categories:⁸

- *Italian / domestic “mafia-type” groups*: of which the four main, longstanding mafia organisations are the Sicilian *Cosa Nostra*, Calabrian *'Ndrangheta*, Neapolitan *Camorra*, and the Apulian *Sacra Corona Unita*. Alongside these, smaller mafia groups are also active, such as the *Stidda*, the *Cursori* and *Laudani* clans in Sicily, the *Società Foggiana* and Gargano’s Mafia in Apulia, and the *Casamonica* in the Lazio Region.
- *Ethnic / foreign groups*, which have origins in Albania, Romania, China, Nigeria, North-Africa, South America, and Eastern Europe. Many of these cooperate with the Italian mafia – mainly, *'Ndrangheta*

5 Federico Varese, “General Introduction: What is Organized Crime?”, in Federico Varese (ed.), *Organised Crime: Criminal Concepts in Criminology*, Vol 1 (London: Routledge, 2010), p.17.

6 Enzo Ciconte, Francesco Forgione, and Isaiah Sales, *Atlante delle Mafie: Storia, Economia, Società, Cultura*, Vol 1 (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2012), pp.11-47. The Neapolitan Camorra is also believed to have been born in the sixteenth century. See Antonio La Spina, *Mafie e Antimafie* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2016), p.16.

7 Interview with Prof. Antonio La Spina, LUISS Guido Carli University, 12 December 2017.

8 Direzione Nazionale Antimafia e Antiterrorismo (DNA), *Relazione annuale sulle attività svolte dal Procuratore nazionale antimafia e dalla Direzione nazionale antimafia nonché sulle dinamiche e strategie della criminalità organizzata di tipo mafioso nel periodo 1° luglio 2015 – 30 giugno 2016*, 12 April 2017 (hereafter “2017 report”); Direzione Investigativa Antimafia (DIA), *Relazione del Ministro dell’Interno al Parlamento sull’Attività svolta e risultati conseguiti dalla Direzione Investigativa Antimafia (secondo semestre 2016)*, 11 July 2017 (hereafter “2016 second semester report”).

and Camorra – in many illicit activities, such as drugs, counterfeiting, and money laundering.⁹

In contrast to Italy, Malta does not have a historical presence of organised crime, though recent developments are concerning. It is one of the EU's leading countries for online gambling, which is considered a high-risk sector for money laundering.¹⁰ Malta's "cash-for-passport" scheme has also attracted criticism for its lack of transparency,¹¹ and the 2017 release of the *Malta Files* showed the presence of Russian and Italian mafia groups on the island.¹² The October 2017 murder of the investigative journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia has only further highlighted the significant problems with corruption on the island, particularly regarding oil smuggling.¹³

Additionally, Latin street gangs are present in Italy, having emerged in the 2000s – in particular of El Salvadoreans, Puerto Ricans, and Dominicans – and are mostly concentrated in Milan and Genoa. There are neither reliable estimates of their numbers, nor of their links to transnational gangs such as MS-13 and Barrio 18. Many are linked to other local gangs, such as Comandos, Trébol and Latin Forever.¹⁴

Activities

As with Europe in general, *drug trafficking* is considered the largest and most profitable activity. Italy's location means that it is a natural destination and transit point for the international drug trade. The peninsula sees the convergence of numerous large-scale routes from South America, the Balkans, and Middle East and North Africa,¹⁵ with drug seizures consistently showing the importance of cocaine and heroin.¹⁶ The market is enormous; worth an estimated €30bn (2% of the global market).¹⁷

Most organised crime groups in Italy are devoted to the importation and exportation of drugs¹⁸ – rather than their cultivation – which has been their principal source of income since the 1970s.¹⁹ Today, the 'Ndrangheta is considered the international leader in cocaine trafficking, thanks to a strong network of brokers and intermediaries in Colombia and Mexico, as well as through consolidated alliances with Albanian and Nigerian crime groups.²⁰

9 DIA, *2016 second semester report*; DNA, *2017 report*.

10 See Il Fatto Quotidiano's "United Mafias of Europe project", available at: <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/longform/mafia-and-organized-crime-in-europe/map/malta/>, and DW interview with Max Heywood from Transparency International, "Inside Europe: Is Malta a mafia state?", DW, 20 October 2017.

11 The Maltese government publishes a list of naturalised citizens, though that list neither distinguishes those who purchased citizenship under the *cash-for-passport* scheme (called the "Individual Investor Programme") from those naturalised for other reasons, nor does it state their (other) nationalities.

12 "Malta target for 'Italian mafia, Russian loan sharks,' says report", *Politico*, 20 May 2017. For more, see <https://eic.network/projects/malta-files/>; "Malta Nostra: how Italian Mafia is using the island to launder money", *L'Espresso*, 25 May 2017.

13 "Death of Maltese journalist 'could be linked to fuel-smuggling network'", *The Guardian*, 24 October 2017.

14 "Le gang sudamericane alla conquista di Milano", *L'Espresso*, 7 October 2015; "La mappa delle gang sudamericane in Italia: tra codici, tatuaggi e iniziazioni", *Rai News*, 13 June 2015.

15 Interview with Col. Claudio Petrozziello, *Guardia di Finanza* Attaché, Italian Embassy in London, 22 November 2017.

16 European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), *Italy Country Drug Report 2017*; DIA, *2016 second semester report*; DNA, *2017 report*.

17 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *World Drug Report 2017*.

18 Interview with Col. Claudio Petrozziello, *Guardia di Finanza* Attaché, Italian Embassy in London, 22 November 2017; DIA, *2016 second semester report*; DNA, *2017 report*; EMCDDA, *Italy Country Drug Report 2017*.

19 Letizia Paoli, "The Illegal Drugs Market", *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, Vol 9, No 2, 2004, pp.186–207.

20 DIA, *2016 second semester report*, p.202; DNA, *2017 report*.

The Camorra also plays an active role,²¹ as do ethnic crime groups in Italy, especially in the heroin, cannabis and hashish trades.²²

Firearms trafficking remains an issue, though its exact scale is near-impossible to quantify. Its importation has historically been associated with the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe, and the conflicts in the 1990s led to a proliferation of weapons, often entering the southern Italian ports – particularly Otranto and Brindisi – from Albania.²³ Today, most weapons still come from Albania and the Former Yugoslavia,²⁴ as seen with the 2016 arrest of an 'Ndrangheta group involved in trafficking deactivated firearms from Slovakia to Italy.²⁵ In Malta, the firearms trade is mostly controlled by Italian mafia groups operating on the island,²⁶ though illicit trade is often difficult to detect.²⁷

Groups have also exploited the ongoing *migrant crisis*, which involves sea crossings from North Africa to Sicily, the small island of Lampedusa, or mainland Italy. Since 2014, this central Mediterranean route has accounted for roughly a quarter of the 1.5m migrants across all routes.²⁸ In 2017 alone there were 119,046 recorded illegal crossings to Italy.²⁹ The profits involved are substantial. In June 2017, the Italian Financial Guard dismantled a huge migrant smuggling organisation between Sicily and Tunisia, which charged each migrant €2-3,000 for the trip. Smugglers could generate revenues of €40,000 for each crossing.³⁰ Mafia groups are known to collude with the foreign crime groups that dominate this business, as seen with dealings between Cosa Nostra, 'Ndrangheta, and Nigerian people traffickers.³¹

Money laundering underpins organised crime. In Italy, estimates of the total illegal proceeds varies, ranging from 1.7 per cent to 12 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP).³² Laundering money frequently involves retails outlets, restaurants and bars, and real estate,³³ and in recent years has also involved *online gambling*. In 2015, €2bn worth of assets were seized by Italian authorities in an anti-money laundering operation, which centred on a vast network of online gambling companies, headquartered in Malta, and controlled by the 'Ndrangheta.³⁴ The case shows the need for legislation to evolve with the times: EU Money Laundering Directives did not cover online gambling at the time.³⁵

21 DIA, *2016 second semester report*, p.202.

22 Ibid.

23 Europol, *EU Organized Crime Threat Assessment*, 2011, p.38; Alison Jamieson, Alessandro Silj, "Migration and Criminality: The case of Albanians in Italy", in *Ethnobarometer Programme, Working Paper No 1*, 1998, p.22; Direzione Nazionale Antimafia (DNA), *Relazione annuale sulle attività svolte dal Procuratore nazionale antimafia e dalla Direzione nazionale antimafia nonché sulle dinamiche e strategie della criminalità organizzata di tipo mafioso nel periodo 1° luglio 2007–30 giugno 2008*, 2008, p.803.; DIA, *2016 first semester report*, pp.158-172.

24 According to the DNA's 2017 report, the majority of people arrested for arm trafficking comes from Albania, followed by Chinese, Romania and Morocco. Weapons include Tokarev pistols, Kalashnikovs, and Chinese grenades.

25 Project FIRE, *Fighting Illicit Firearms Trafficking: Routes and Actors at European level*, Transcrime, 2017, p.31.

26 Interview with Dr. Sandra Scicluna, University of Malta, 22 November 2017.

27 Ibid.

28 International Organization for Migration (IOM), *Fatal Journeys Volume 3: Improving Data on Missing Migrants*, Part 1, International Organization for Migration, 2017, p.64.

29 See Frontex's "Central Mediterranean Route" page, available at: <http://frontex.europa.eu/trends-and-routes/central-mediterranean-route/>.

30 "Smantellata associazione criminale dedita al favoreggiamento dell'immigrazione clandestina, contrabbando e riciclaggio", *Guardia di Finanza*, 6 June 2017.

31 DIA, *2016 second semester report*, p.202.

32 Financial Action Task Force (FATF), *Anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist financing measures - Italy Mutual Evaluation Report*, 2016, p.6.

33 An exhaustive list is provided by Project IARM, *Assessing the risk of money laundering in Europe - Final Report of Project IARM*, Transcrime, 2017, pp.72-74.

34 Europol Financial Intelligence Group, *From Suspicion to Action: Converting financial intelligence into greater operational impact*, 2017, p.14; "Ndrangheta, colpo alle scommesse online: 41 arresti, sequestrati beni per 2 miliardi", *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 22 July 2015.

35 The EU's 4th Money Laundering Directive, which came into effect in June 2017, covers online gambling.

Locations

The geography of Italy and Malta has a huge influence in facilitating organised crime. Both countries sit at the confluence of the Balkans, North Africa, and Central and Western Europe, and so are natural destinations and transit points for illicit trade. The difficulties in policing the Mediterranean Sea – combined with an extensive coastline and numerous ports – mean that the area has historically been a haven for such activity.

Territorial control is an intrinsic part of the *modus operandi* of Italian mafia groups, as they seek to establish governance and monopoly in their areas of influence.³⁶ Most of these groups emerged in Southern Italy: the 'Ndrangheta in Calabria; the Cosa Nostra in Sicily; and the Camorra in Napoli. Yet due to the international nature of illicit trade, these groups have also established overseas operating bases – particularly in regard to the drug trade – and have also expanded within Italy, to the Centre and North of the country.³⁷

³⁶ Federico Varese, "General Introduction: What is Organized Crime?", p.17; Diego Gambetta, *The Sicilian Mafia: The Business of Private Protection* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1993).

³⁷ DIA, 2016 second semester report.

3 Terrorism

Dating back to the late 1960s, Italy has a long history of terrorism,³⁸ especially from the far-right and the far-left. Recent years have been comparatively quiet, but this does not mean that jihadist groups like al-Qaeda and Islamic State have been inactive or entirely absent. Although no large-scale attacks have succeeded, there have been numerous arrests and several attempts by supporters of Islamic State to carry out attacks. Furthermore, there is evidence that Italy-based jihadists are integrated into networks that operate in other parts of the continent. Given the continued prominence of Italy – especially the city of Rome – in jihadist propaganda, Italian authorities are well advised to remain vigilant.

Jihadists

While most Western European countries have been impacted by the wave of Islamist-inspired attacks since 2014, Italy has – so far – largely escaped this violence. There have been no jihadist attacks in the country in recent years, although some plots have been disrupted, mostly at a very early stage.

This is despite Italy having a history of jihadist networks operating in the country since the 1990s, often relating to groups in North Africa. In Milan, Egyptian Gamaa al-Islamiya supporters used the Islamic Culture Institute (ICI) to provide major logistical support for jihadists wanting to fight in Bosnia.³⁹ In Naples, Algerian jihadist groups emerged during the Algerian Civil War, and this activity seems to continue to the present day.⁴⁰ Turin has long been a hub, with the neighbourhoods of Porta Palazzo and San Salvario seeing numerous individuals deported for national security reasons.⁴¹

Italy is an attractive target for jihadists – in part due to its legacy as the centre of Christianity – and features throughout jihadist propaganda. The Islamic State has encouraged its followers to carry out attacks in “crusader” Italy, and its *Rumiyah* (Rome) magazine routinely states: “We will not rest from our jihad except beneath the olive trees of *Rumiyah* (Rome)”.

Malta, on the other hand, does not have an active jihadist scene.⁴² Indeed, there is little evidence that its residents have been involved in extremist groups. Nevertheless, the Maltese government includes terrorism on its agenda and participates in EU counter terrorism efforts.

38 We define terrorism as symbolic acts of politically motivated violence. See Peter R. Neumann and M.L.R. Smith, *The Strategy of Terrorism* (London: Routledge, 2008), p.8.

39 Lorenzo Vidino, *Islam, Islamism and Jihadism in Italy*, Hudson Institute, 4 August 2008.

40 “Terrorismo: algerino arrestato dal Ros nella stazione di Foggia”, *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 15 December 2017.

41 “Antiterrorismo, Espulso imam di Torino”, *Corriere della Sera*, 7 September 2005.

42 Interview with Dr. Trevor Calafato, University of Malta, 30 November 2017.

Attacks, Plots and Arrests

Over the past five years there have been no jihadist attacks in Italy or Malta – with the possible exception of Ismail Tommaso Ben Youssef Hosni (see below) – although there have been several jihadist plots.⁴³ These plots have been largely aspirational, with no weapons, explosives, or concrete plans discovered, in part due to the Italian authorities' low risk threshold:

- *March 2012*: Mohammed Jarmoune, a known jihadist propagandist, scouted potential targets for attack in Milan, including a synagogue. He was eventually sentenced for disseminating terrorist propaganda.⁴⁴
- *April 2016*: Four suspects are arrested after discussing a suicide bombing operation targeting the Vatican or the Israeli Embassy in Rome.⁴⁵
- *May 2016*: Two Afghan citizens allegedly linked to al-Qaeda and Islamic State plotted to attack the Colosseum and the Circus Maximus in Rome.⁴⁶
- *March 2017*: Three men from Kosovo are arrested and expelled from Italian territory following audio surveillance of them plotting to blow up Rialto Bridge in Venice.⁴⁷
- *May 2017*: Ismail Tommaso Ben Youssef Hosni, a homeless 20-year-old Italian, stabbed a policeman and two soldiers with kitchen knives in Milan, after they asked to see his identity papers. Hosni, who had a criminal record for drug dealing, was under the influence of cocaine. His Facebook profile showed he was an Islamic State sympathiser, though investigations into any jihadist motive are ongoing.⁴⁸

Aside from disrupted plots, the number of arrests is relatively low. From 2012 to 2016, 100 arrests were made for jihadist terrorism-related activity, with 12 convictions.⁴⁹ The year 2016 alone saw 28 individuals arrested for jihadist activities.⁵⁰ Of these, 19 people were involved in recruiting for Islamic State and facilitating the movement of foreign fighters.⁵¹

43 Michele Groppi, "The Terror Treat to Italy: How Italian Exceptionalism is Rapidly Diminishing", *CTC Sentinel*, Vol 10, Issue 5, May 2017, pp.20-28.

44 "Progettava attentato alla sinagoga di Milano, arrestato per terrorismo marocchino 20enne", *Corriere della Sera*, 15 March 2012.

45 "Terrorismo, sei arresti in Lombardia. I pm: 'Tra gli obiettivi Vaticano e ambasciata Israele a Roma'", *La Repubblica*, 28 April 2016.

46 "Terrorismo, volevano colpire il Circo Massimo e il Colosseo: fermati tre jihadisti tra Bari e Milano", *Il Messaggero*, 10 May 2016.

47 "Metti una bomba a Rialto e guadagni subito il paradiso". Venezia, sgominata cellula jihadista", *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, 30 March 2017.

48 "Hosni, l'aggressore della Centrale: 'Mi dispiace, ma ero arrabbiato' I post su Isis e l'accusa di terrorismo", *Corriere Della Sera*, 19 May 2017. See also, Lorenzo Vidino and Francesco Marone, *The Jihadist Threat in Italy: A Primer*, Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale (ISPI), 13 November 2017.

49 Europol, *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TESAT) 2013; 2014; 2015; 2016; and 2017*.

50 Europol, *TESAT 2017*, p.50.

51 *Ibid.*, pp.13-14.

Italy regularly expels those suspected of extremism, and does so as citizenship is rarely granted to foreigners. Since 2015, 242 people have been deported for religious extremism.⁵² In 2017, this figure was 105, and to date, eight have been deported in 2018.⁵³

Attacks in other European countries have also had a connection to Italy. Anis Amri, who killed 12 people in an attack on a Berlin Christmas market in December 2016, was radicalised in Italy, and was eventually shot and killed in Milan after fleeing the attack. Youssef Zaghba, one of the June 2017 London Bridge attackers that left 8 people dead, was an Italian-Moroccan citizen whom Italian authorities were monitoring.⁵⁴

Foreign Fighters and Returnees

Since 2012, more than six thousand Europeans have travelled to Syria and Iraq as “foreign fighters” to join jihadist groups, especially Islamic State. Italy has been affected by this mobilisation, with approximately 130 individuals having left the country.⁵⁵ This is considerably lower than other European countries with similar population sizes, such as Spain and the United Kingdom. Approximately 70 remain alive, of which a dozen have returned to Italy.⁵⁶ It is unknown whether any left from Malta.

Italian jihadists, like their counterparts throughout Europe, have diverse backgrounds with no uniform demographic or socio-economic characteristics. In contrast to other countries, Italy has not witnessed the growth of large militant Salafi organisations and recruiting pipelines, and the jihadist scene is relatively small and unsophisticated.⁵⁷

Irrespective of these comparatively small numbers, Italian authorities are concerned about the threat of returnees seeking to exploit the migrant crisis by travelling to Europe via Italy.⁵⁸ Cases of refugees with jihadist backgrounds arriving in Italy have already occurred (see below).⁵⁹

Far-Left and Anarchist Extremists

Italy has one of the strongest traditions of left-wing and anarchist political violence in Europe, alongside Spain and Greece (the so-called ‘Mediterranean Anarchist Triangle’). The greatest threat is currently from the active and resilient *Federazione Anarchica Informale/Fronte Rivoluzionario Internazionale* (FAI/FRI, Informal Anarchist Federation/International Revolutionary Front).

52 Latest figures from the Ministry of the Interior: <http://www.interno.gov.it/sala-stampa/comunicati-stampa/eseguite-due-espulsioni-motivi-sicurezza-stato>; Also see Francesco Marone, *The Use of Deportation in Counter-Terrorism: Insights from the Italian Case*, International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague (ICCT), 13 March 2017.

53 2018 figure correct as of February 1st.

54 “Italy police chief says conscience clear over Islamist attacker”, *Reuters*, 7 June 2017.

55 Latest figure released by the Italian Minister of the Interior, in May 2017; “Gli 007: in Italia 11 foreign fighters. Nel mirino i jihadisti reduci del conflitto siriano”, *Il Messaggero*, 30 December 2017.

56 Richard Barrett, *Beyond the Caliphate: Foreign Fighters and the Threat of Returnees*, The Soufan Center, 2017, p.11.

57 Interview with Dr. Lorenzo Vidino, 18 November 2017.

58 “Minniti: È concreta l’ipotesi che i foreign fighters possano arrivare con i barconi”, *Rai News*, 22 October 2017; Alessandro Boncio, *The Islamic State’s Crisis and Returning Foreign Fighters: The Case of Italy*, Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale (ISPI), 3 November 2017.

59 Europol, *TESAT 2017*, p.14.

Tactics involve unsophisticated improvised explosive devices (IEDs) – typically as parcel bombs – which often fail to detonate.⁶⁰ Targets include government buildings, properties, banks, as well as civilians that work at these locations. Violence has often been migration-related, targeting the Identification and Deportation Centre (CIE) in particular.

The severity of attacks remains low. From 2012 to 2016, there were 43 left-wing and anarchist terrorist attacks, with zero fatalities. The number of arrests is similarly low, with only 36 people arrested over that same period.⁶¹

Overall, therefore, Italy has – so far – successfully avoided the high levels of radicalisation and terrorist activity that have been experienced in other parts of Europe, especially France and the United Kingdom. At the same time, it has continued to play a prominent role in jihadist narratives, and there is no inherent reason why jihadist groups should not in future choose the country as a target.

60 Europol, *TESAT 2017*, p.42.

61 Europol, *TESAT 2013; 2014; 2015; 2016; and 2017*.

4 The Absent Mafia-Jihadist Nexus

During the 1990s, the mafia engaged in acts of violence against the state, which would have met many definitions of terrorism. In May 1992, for example, the Cosa Nostra detonated 400 kilograms of explosives underneath the A29 highway in Sicily, killing the anti-mafia judge Giovanni Falcone who was travelling in a police convoy. Another prominent anti-mafia judge, Paolo Borsellino, and his police escort were also killed by a car bomb in July 1992. In 1993 a campaign of five car bombings, which hit symbolic targets throughout Italy, left ten people dead.⁶²

Beyond using terror as a tactic, Italian mafia groups have also had reported interactions – and even functioning relationships – with terrorist groups. In 1981, for example, the Neapolitan Camorra allegedly facilitated the ransom payment of Ciriaco De Mita, a politician who had been kidnapped by the left-wing terrorist group *Brigate Rosse* (Red Brigades).⁶³ And in 1989, police disrupted an operation between the 'Ndrangheta and a Palestinian militia to traffic arms.⁶⁴ A mafia-terrorist nexus, therefore, is neither inconceivable nor unprecedented.

Given this history, it is no wonder that claims of mafia collaboration with jihadist groups have emerged following Islamic State's dramatic rise in 2014, especially in relation to the trafficking of drugs, antiquities, oil, and migrants.⁶⁵ The Italian authorities are currently pursuing various investigations, and – while they do not dismiss the potential for this kind of collaboration – there is currently no conclusive proof that a fully-fledged nexus exists. However, there remains a significant risk that criminal groups are *unwittingly* facilitating the entry of jihadists into Europe through their involvement in the smuggling of migrants, as well as short-term, tactical cooperation in document forging and weapons smuggling.

62 Tamara Makarenko, *Europe's Crime-Terror Nexus: Links between terrorist and organised crime groups in the European Union*, European Parliament Directorate General for Internal Policies (Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs), October 2012, p.35. "Bombings Laid to Mafia War on Italy and Church", *New York Times*, 15 July 1994.

63 Tom Behan, *See Naples and Die: The Camorra and Organised Crime* (London: IB Taurus), pp.131-154.

64 *International Herald Tribune*, 14 September 1989, cited in Albert J. Jongman, "Trends in International and Domestic Terrorism in Western Europe, 1968-1988", in Crelinsten & Schmid (eds.) (2012), *Western Responses to Terrorism*, p.67.

65 "The Mafia Runs Guns for ISIS in Europe", *The Daily Beast*, 24 March 2016; "The Camorra-Connected Couple Running Guns – and Choppers – to ISIS", *The Daily Beast*, 6 February 2017; "Is Cosa Nostra now selling deadly assault weapons to Islamist terrorist groups?", *The Guardian*, 24 July 2016; "Arte antica in cambio di armi, affari d'oro in Italia per l'asse fra Isis e 'Ndrangheta", *La Stampa*, 16 October 2016.

Drug Trafficking

There have been numerous stories about links between the mafia and Islamic State in relation to the trade in Tramadol – a synthetic opiate drug for which there seems to be a large illicit market, especially in North Africa.⁶⁶ In May 2016, Greek police seized 26 million pills bound for a recipient in Libya suspected of “having relations with the Islamic State”, according to a director from Greece’s Financial Crimes Unit (SDOE).⁶⁷ In May 2017, Italian police seized 37 million pills in the port of Genoa – allegedly linked to Islamic State – bound for Misrata and Tobruk in Libya,⁶⁸ and later in November 2017 captured another shipment in the Calabrian port of Gioia Tauro, this time containing 24 million pills.⁶⁹ Although it has been established that all of these drugs had been imported from India, their distribution channels – whether to Islamic State or other jihadist groups – are often unknown, and none of the investigations have so far supported allegations of conscious links to organised crime groups in Italy.⁷⁰

Similar claims have surrounded the hashish trade, which involves a convoluted smuggling route that begins in Morocco, passes through Libya and the Middle East, and enters Europe via the Balkans.⁷¹ Given that the Islamic State once had substantial control of the port of Sirte in Libya – and was known to tax goods passing through its territory – speculation has centred on the potential for Islamic State to profit from this smuggling route. However, the exact path of these drugs took is unknown, and investigators acknowledged the difficulties in tracking the drugs once they reach Libya.⁷² While it seems clear that North African militias are facilitating and profiting from this smuggling, it remains unclear what involvement Italian crime groups have in this trade.

Antiquities

It remains impossible to say how much money groups like the Islamic State have made from selling antiquities, whether in Syria and Iraq, or in Libya. The evidence suggests that the group has earned money by selling digging permits and charging transit fees, rather than having vertically-integrated control over the sale of artefacts. While there have been sporadic claims of Islamic State-linked smugglers, the 'Ndrangheta, and the Camorra trafficking in archaeological relics from Libya,⁷³ it remains to be seen how consistent these links were, and whether they constituted direct links between jihadists and the mafia.⁷⁴

66 International Narcotics Control Board, Report of the International Narcotics Control Board for 2016, 2017, p.52, para. 395; “A pill for work and play”, *The Economist*, 18 April 2015.

67 “Greece discovers huge quantity of opiates, investigates Islamic State link”, *Reuters*, 6 June 2016.

68 “Police seize 37m painkilling pills bound for ISIS”, *The Times*, 10 May 2017.

69 “Italy says seizes opiates meant to finance Islamic State”, *Reuters*, 3 November 2017; “Gioia Tauro, sequestrata droga dell’ISIS. Dda: ‘Ci sono rapporti fra ‘ndrangheta e Stato Islamico’”, *La Repubblica*, 3 November 2017.

70 Interview with Italian *Guardia di Finanza* Attaché for Financial Crimes, Anti-money Laundering and Counter-terrorism, Italian Embassy in London, 22 November 2017. For the most recent report of such allegations, see Barbie Latza Nadeau, “The Italian Mob is Peddling Pills to Isis”, *Daily Beast*, 3 February 2018.

71 Rukmini Callimachi and Lorenzo Tondo, “Scaling Up a Drug Trade, Straight Through ISIS Turf”, *New York Times*, 13 September 2016; “Spain seizes drugs shipment destined to fund terrorism”, *The Local*, 12 October 2016.

72 *Ibid.*

73 “Arte antica in cambio di armi, affari d’oro in Italia per l’asse fra Isis e ‘Ndrangheta”, *La Stampa*, 16 October 2016.

74 “Alfano conferma: ‘I reperti trafugati alimentano l’Isis e il pil del terrore’”, *La Stampa*, 17 October 2017.

Oil

Another area for potential collaboration is the smuggling of fuel, especially from Libya.⁷⁵ In October 2017, the Italian Guardia di Finanza arrested nine people for their alleged involvement in smuggling oil from the Zawiya refinery via the Libyan port of Zuwarah and Malta, where the cargo is transferred to Italy for processing and distribution.⁷⁶ Those involved in the operation have been reported to have links to Libyan militias that control Zawiya and Zuwarah as well as the Santapaola-Ercolano clan of the Sicilian mafia,⁷⁷ though – again – direct links with Islamic State or al-Qaeda are hard to prove.

Migrant Smuggling

One of the most significant areas of concern is the possibility of criminal groups facilitating the entry of jihadists into Europe through their control of migrant routes. In May 2017, Italian police arrested members of a Bari-based human trafficking ring, which had been in contact with members of the Somali jihadist group Al-Shabaab, as well as a Somali who had previously facilitated the entry of two Islamic State foreign fighters into Italy.⁷⁸ While it is not clear whether the criminals *actively knew* that they were facilitating the entry of jihadists, the episode shows how the line between criminal traffickers and extremist networks can be blurred. It also highlights the risk that criminals, through their involvement in people smuggling, are *unwittingly* facilitating the entry of jihadists into Europe.

In general, however, there is little evidence of long-term, well-established partnerships, joint alliances, or financial links between Italian mafia groups and jihadists. While the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, the threat of greater attention from Italian – and international – law enforcement agencies may act as a powerful disincentive. As such, sustained and systematic involvement in – or even enabling of – jihadist-related activity may be understood by organised crime as a “red line”.⁷⁹

75 Also see Ann Marlowe, “Why does EU tolerate Libya’s smuggler kingpin as migrants drown?”, *Asia Times*, 16 October 2015; and United Nations, *Final report of the Panel of Experts in accordance with paragraph 13 of resolution 2278 (2016)*, UN Security Council, 1 June 2017, para. 251.

76 “Italy breaks up Libyan fuel smuggling ring involving mafia”, *Reuters*, 18 October 2017; “Fuel smuggled from Libya being brought to Malta – UN”, *Times of Malta*, 12 March 2016; United Nations, *Final report of the Panel of Experts in accordance with paragraph 24 (d) of resolution 2213 (2015)*, UN Security Council, 4 March 2016, p.46.

77 “Gasolio libico rubato e riciclato in Europa, l'ombra Isis e mafia”, *La Stampa*, 18 October 2017; DIA, *2016 second semester report*, p.65.

78 “Tra Bari e Malta Operazione di Polizia: ‘HAWALA.NET’”, *Polizia di Stato*, 10 May 2017.

79 Martin Gallagher, “Modelling Entrepreneurial Endeavour in the Nexus between Terrorism and Organised Crime: Does Supporting Terrorism Present a Red Line in Organised Criminals Pursuit of Profit?”, in Gerard McElwee, Robert Smith (eds.), *Exploring Criminal and Illegal Enterprise: New Perspectives on Research, Policy & Practice (Contemporary Issues in Entrepreneurship Research, Volume 5)*, Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2015, pp.51-74.

5 The Prisons Nexus

Just as mafia groups used prisons as a place of diffusion,⁸⁰ the potential exists – albeit on a smaller scale – for a similar diffusion of jihadist ideas behind bars. It is clear to see why. Prisons are near-perfect environments for radical ideas to spread, and they are places where the criminal and extremist milieus are in their closest proximity (see Box 2). While Italy – which currently has a prison population of around 55,000, of which at least 7,500 inmates practice Islam⁸¹ – has rarely suffered from this problem, there are indications that prison radicalisation is a growing area of concern.

Recent deportation cases highlight how prisons can be incubators of radicalisation and mobilise into action those that are *already* radicalised. For example, in January 2018, an Egyptian citizen who was in prison for property crimes was expelled from Italy after attempting to radicalise others in prison by distributing Islamic State propaganda that praised the “conquest of Rome” and glorified “martyrdom”.⁸² During the same month, a 35-year old Tunisian, who had been arrested in 2013 on drugs charges, was deported after drawings of weapons and jihadist symbols were found in his cell in Due Palazzi prison in Padua.⁸³ In December 2017, authorities deported a Frenchman who had been arrested for petty crimes – himself previously radicalised in a French prison – after officials noted his continued radicalisation in Cuneo prison.⁸⁴

They are part of a broader trend of criminal and extremist milieus merging, which reflects the situation seen in other European countries. In January 2018, a street vendor who had been repeatedly penalised for handling stolen goods and trading in counterfeit goods was expelled from Italy because of his growing extremism.⁸⁵ In November 2017 a 31-year old Tunisian, who had been arrested for drugs offences, was expelled from the country because authorities suspected him of having been to Syria as a foreign fighter.⁸⁶ Another Tunisian national, who had been arrested for petty crimes and drug dealing, was deported in September of the same year, after promoting Islamic State and sharing the group’s propaganda on the internet.⁸⁷

While these cases demonstrate the prevalence of the issue, they also show that the authorities are aware of the issue and have started to action. In many cases, this consists of deportations, which Italian authorities have used as a strategic counterterrorism tool. There are also new efforts to detect, counter, and prevent radicalisation within the Italian prison system, which are positive and should be expanded.

80 “Le mafie come metodo e modello”, *La Repubblica*, 18 November 2014; “La Mafia lavora anche in carcere”, *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, 7 October 2016; Federica Radaelli, “Il carcere nella cultura mafiosa”, Università degli studi di Milano (thesis), p.20.

81 “Relazione sull’amministrazione della giustizia per il Senato 2016”, *Gabinetto del Ministro*, 18 January 2017, p.109.

82 “Eseguite due espulsioni per motivi di sicurezza dello Stato”, Ministero dell’Interno, 26 January 2018.

83 “Disegna armi e attentati Espulso pusher tunisino”, *Alto Adige*, 20 January 2018.

84 “Espulso cittadino francese 23enne per motivi di sicurezza nazionale”, Ministero dell’Interno, 15 December 2017.

85 “Straniero espulso e rimpatriato in Marocco per motivi di sicurezza dello Stato”, Ministero dell’Interno, 5 January 2018.

86 “Espulsi due cittadini marocchini e un tunisino”, Ministero dell’Interno, 19 November 2017.

87 “Predicava ai giovani la jihad, imam tunisino espulso da Milano”, *Corriere della Sera*, 8 September 2017.

Box 2: Karlito Brigande

In November 2015, Italian *carabinieri* discovered Karlito Brigande, a Macedonian criminal-turned-jihadist, was planning to join the Islamic State. After searching four of his mobile phones, the police uncovered a series of conversations and voice chats Brigande had with his friend Firas Barhoumi, who was already in Islamic State territory and encouraging Brigande to join him, possibly for a suicide operation.

In April 2017, Brigande was sentenced to 8 years in prison for terrorism offences.⁸⁸ The prosecutor described him as one of the most dangerous Macedonian criminals from the past twenty years. His case is illustrative of the “networking” that can take place in prison.

Born in Macedonia in 1975 as *Vulnet Makelara*, Brigande has frequently switched between crime and extremism throughout his life. Prior to officially changing his name to *Karlito Brigande* (in honour of Al Pacino’s character in the gangster movie *Carlito’s Way*) he used several other nicknames to evade the authorities, such as “Ramazan Ciu”, “Darko Stojanoski”, “Stankov”.⁸⁹ Brigande was an ex-militant of the Kosovo Liberation Army (*Ushtria Çlirimtare Kombëtare*, or *UÇK*) in Macedonia, with a history of convictions for extortion, weapons trafficking, human trafficking, and document fraud.⁹⁰ In Italy he had been sentenced to 15 years for extortion, and was also arrested in Skopje, Macedonia, for arms trafficking.

In late 2014 he met Firas Barhoumi, a self-styled radical imam, in Rebibbia prison. Barhoumi encouraged the radicalisation of Brigande, and their friendship continued following Brigande’s release from prison the following year. Barhoumi wrote to him: “You know not all men are men, the lion remains a lion, the dog remains a dog”. Brigande was keen for redemption: “So many times I repeat the word Allah forgive me for sin, I purify myself for you”.⁹¹

88 “Condannato a 8 anni il foreign fighter Karlito Brigande”, *La Presse*, 26 April 2017.

89 “Isis a Roma: condannato a 8 anni Karlito Brigande, il ‘foreign fighter’ di Torre Maura”, *Roma Today*, 27 April 2017.

90 “Roma, arrestato Karlito Brigande, ex criminale macedone arruolato nell’Is: cellula pronta a attentato in Iraq”, *La Repubblica*, 12 March 2016.

91 Floriana Bulfon, “Il terrorismo islamista in Italia tra fede e spaccio”, *L’Espresso*, 2 December 2016.

6 Recommendations

This paper has examined potential links between crime and terrorism in Italy and Malta. While we have found no institutionalised, long-standing links between organised crime and terrorism, there are areas of concern. One is the potential for criminal groups to *unwittingly* facilitate the entry of jihadists into Europe via their control of smuggling routes. Another is the potential merging of criminal and jihadist milieus, especially among petty criminals and within prisons.

To prevent such links from emerging – and the nascent links from being further entrenched – we recommend the following actions and/or good practices:

1. Effective monitoring

We recommend that authorities continue to periodically review their statistics on organised crime and terrorism, and consciously monitor them for emerging linkages between the two phenomena.

2. Re-thinking radicalisation

Given the partial merging of terrorist and criminal milieus, core assumptions about radicalisation need to be reconsidered. The behaviour of jihadists with criminal pasts often contradicts the notion that extremism correlates with religious behaviour. Where needed, we recommend that authorities update their checklists, indicators, and training materials in order to reflect changing patterns and profiles.

3. Safer prisons

Italian authorities recognise the importance of prisons as potential incubators of links between crime and terrorism. We encourage them to move forward with implementing systematic efforts to make prisons safer from crime, terrorism, and any links between them.

4. Countering all streams of terrorist financing

Efforts to countering terrorist finance have excessively focused on the international financial system – with meagre results. We recommend that authorities broaden their efforts at countering terrorist finance to include small-scale and petty crime, such as drug dealing, theft, robberies, and the trafficking in goods.

5. Information sharing

Italy's various authorities – such as the judiciary, Anti-Mafia Directorate (DIA), the Italian Police, Carabinieri, and Guardia di Finanza – have a proven ability to cooperate in the fight against money laundering and illicit trade, which should also be deployed in discovering potential links with terrorism.⁹² Furthermore, it is in Italy's interests to lobby for more effective legal cooperation among European Union member states.⁹³

6. Countering migrant smuggling

While there is no conclusive proof of a formal nexus between mafia and jihadist groups, one of the most significant risks is that criminal groups *unwittingly* facilitate the entry of jihadists into Europe via their involvement in people smuggling. Disrupting the activities of criminal groups in this area should therefore be a priority.

⁹² Interview with Col. Claudio Petrozziello, *Guardia di Finanza* Attaché, Italian Embassy in London, 22 November 2017.

⁹³ *Ibid.*; Franco Roberti, Former Anti-Mafia Directorate (DNA), during a conference held at LUISS Guido Carli University, 24 November 2017.



Crime Terror Nexus

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