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CONFRONTING THREATS FROM THE POLITICAL-CRIMINAL NEXUS IN GREATER CENTRAL EURASIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR OPERATIONS AND FUTURE ARMED CONFLICTS

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Not only are the problems of organised crime, corruption, insurgency, arms proliferation and the narcotics trade mutually reinforcing and convergent, they are also enduring.

This study presents a qualitative analysis of the anatomy of linkages between entrepreneurs of crime and political violence with specific reference to the Greater Central Eurasian region. A conceptual basis of the links between organised crime, terrorism and insurgency shall be outlined and systematically used to identify how these phenomena come together in several regional theatres of particular relevance to European security, i.e. that also have a direct impact on how the nexus between organised crime and terrorism is evolving in the EU.

The duplication and hybridisation of unconventional threats emerging out of the interplay of disparate sets of actors proceeding illicitly along the “Trans-Eurasian pipeline” today goes well beyond “traditional” transnational organised crime activities, such as narcotics and fire-arms trafficking, as it also includes smuggling vulnerable people, movement of insurgents, irregular foreign fighters, crime enforcers etc., and is often believed to encompass the potential for weapons of mass destruction-related trafficking by designated terrorist organisations. The Afghan and Pakistani cases notwithstanding, criminal groups and organised interests from and within the broader Central Eurasian region have been steadily growing in financial strength, territorial control and political alliances over the past two decades. Whilst most states in the region are not collapsing as such, some of them however risk becoming shell-states, hollowed out from the inside by criminal interests colluding with corrupt officials in the government and the security services. This not only jeopardised their survival, it also poses a serious threat to regional and international security because of the transnational nature of crimes. Now, in somewhat of a similar vein to what was observed in Latin American context in the 1980/90s, significant synergistic destabilisation patterns can be observed in several regions at the margins of Greater

Europe (from Ukraine and Moldova to the Black Sea Region and the Caucasus), and throughout the broader Central Eurasian space, where en-during patterns of interaction and co-operation between insurgent/armed opposition groups, eventually falling onto the legally defined category of foreign terrorist organisations (FTOs), and organised crime organisations, often transnational in nature (TOCs), and deeply infiltrated within state institutions, are thriving around an estimated \$50 billion Afghan heroin market as cornerstone of a transnational political economy of crime.

Linking these dynamics to current debates on the implications of ways organised criminal behaviours and organised criminal activities are affecting and being affected by (a) local conflict dynamics, especially that of insurgency-based conflicts, and the politics of terrorist and insurgent violence in context of state fragility or failure, and (b) the processes of global security governance, of which stabilisation (peace-/state-building) processes and indeed peace operations are one of the international community’s primary tools for stabilising fragile or conflict-ridden states, this study investigates, notably in light of the Afghan experience, the challenges ahead regarding the implementation of accompanying measures within stabilisation programmes, notably in terms of opportunities for organised crime and the corruption that accompanies it, and the financing of insurgency and export-prone terrorism, so as to chip away at and contribute to breaking linkages. <