

COUNTERINTELLIGENCE IN THE BALKANS AND EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN. THE COUNTERINTELLIGENCE METHODS OF TRANSNATIONAL GROUPS

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Abstract: *In the post-Cold War era, new challenges emerged that have threatened regional and global security. Before the turn of the 21st century, the world was primarily dominated by states, but now, non-state actors are of critical importance in national and international security in today's globalizing and multipolar world. Of these non-state actors, transnational organized crime networks and groups have become a key security threat in the national, regional, and global environment. Transnational organized crime groups threaten to destabilize basic societal, economic, and political institutions and values. While all nations face the threat of transnational organized crime groups, those post-war and post-conflict nations in transition are especially fragile to the effects that transnational organized crime groups can have on a nation's government, economy, and society. The Balkan region has all been plagued by conflict and instability since the civil wars of the 1990s. Today, the Balkan and Eastern Mediterranean region has reemerged with strategic importance as the instability of nations in these regions are particularly susceptible to external malign influence by state and non-state actors. Concerns regarding the rise of transnational organized crime and its relationship with religious extremist groups have caused the international community to refocus on the Balkan and Eastern Mediterranean regions. Increasingly, transnational organized crime groups along with international terrorist groups are beginning to share organizational and operational features. Additionally, when it becomes advantageous, these groups will partner with each other. Transnational organized crime networks and groups have grown in both size and sophistication, and many major groups behave and assume the structure of secret organizations. Powerful transnational organized crime groups have developed in accordance with the structures of their host countries, which is why it is these groups flourish in those countries with more fragile political institutions. The ways in which transnational organized crime groups think and operate have made them successful. These groups take their illicit business ventures seriously, and understanding what these groups do, how they operate, and who they work with is critical in defeating them. By examining effective counterintelligence methods, this paper will focus on the strategic importance of transnational organized crime in the Balkan and Eastern Mediterranean region, with a particular focus on Albania.*

Keywords: *the Balkan and Eastern Mediterranean regions; transnational organized crime groups; counterintelligence methods.*

Transnational Security and Organized Crime

Transnational groups are international organizations that transcend the idea of a nation-state. Transitional groups are non-governmental groups, and the activities of these groups transcend borders. Transnational organized crime (TOC) is organized crime coordinated across national borders and involves participation in illicit markets in more than one country. (UNODC, 2010) To accomplish their goals, criminal organizations use systematic violence and corruption to maintain their operations. The Balkans and Eastern Mediterranean region are home to various criminal networks and organizations that run well-established trafficking and smuggling operations. TOC groups exploit weak governments, endemic corruption, weak borders, and poor security conditions. (Haziri, 2017)

The Balkans have become an ideal environment for the development and growth of TOC. Weak institutions in Albania, Kosovo, and Bosnia-Herzegovina have enabled TOC groups to seize control of key drug and human trafficking routes from the Middle East to Western European markets. Furthermore, the Balkans region has become a new entry point for Latin American cocaine and a transit region for heroin chemicals used in the Caucasus and Afghanistan (Persi, Giacomo Paoli and Bellasio, Jacopo, 2017). The trafficking of firearms and weapons in the region is also of particular concern, and ineffective border control in critical nations in the Balkans has enabled the transit of TOC actors and terrorist affiliates into Western Europe. Throughout 1990 the security and geopolitical foundation in the Balkan and Eastern Mediterranean region that has shaped the TOC networks and groups have been primarily shaped by the end of the Cold war, the conflicts in the territory of the former Yugoslavia, and the continued antagonism between Greece and Turkey (Persi, Giacomo Paoli and Bellasio, Jacopo, 2017). As a result, the illicit activities of TOC groups in the region have seen a significant overlap and intersection between trafficking routes, actors, and the implications of various trafficking activities. The illegal activities used by TOC groups to generate funds come together in an illicit economy underpinned by four interconnected markets, specifically the trafficking of weapons, humans, narcotics, and other illegal commodities. In combatting TOC, cooperation between the European Union and the United States as well as bilateral cooperation with countries in the region to foster solid legal institutions, good governance, and economic progress in the Balkans will be critical.

Crime-Terror Nexus

The concept of the crime-terror nexus is not new. It developed in the early 1990s after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the start of the information age. The nexus between transnational organized crime and terrorism represents a growing threat worldwide (National Archives and Records Administration, 2016). The overlapping of criminal and terrorist actors, tactics, and resources enable them to gain substantial power to threaten security, peace, and economic development. Among the shifting geopolitics and effects of globalization, religiously motivated extremist individuals and groups began to adopt criminal methods to further their aims. Terrorists and insurgents increasingly turn to TOC to generate funding for illicit activities and gain logistical support to carry out their violent acts (Sanderson, 2004).

Albanian Organized Crime

Albania is a small country located north of Greece in the western part of the Balkan Peninsula (Bamiatzis, 2018). After about five centuries of Ottoman rule, most of Albania follows the Islamic religion. About seven-tenths of the Albanian population is predominantly Sunni Muslim, with the next largest group falling under the Bektashi sect of Islam (Bamiatzis, 2018). The resurgence of nationalism, the spread of conflict in the successor states of former Yugoslavia, the breakdown of government power in Albania, the weak justice system, and economic problems have all nurtured organized crime in the Balkans. The geography of the Balkan Route starts from Afghanistan, transverses through the Middle East, exits via Turkey through Greece, and travels up into Albania as well as other Balkan states. Albania is a major source and transit nation for organized crime and human trafficking throughout Europe. Albanian organized crime profits greatly from smuggling networks from the Middle East and North Africa via routes through Turkey into Greece and then into the rest of Europe as smugglers try and reach Western Europe. Albania's human smuggling operations are involved at the international and domestic levels and rely on the cooperation with human smugglers in surrounding countries as well to facilitate the journeys (The Organized Crime Index | ENACT,

2022). The endemic corruption in Albania has only exacerbated the issue of organized crime within the country. With the strong structure of the Albanian mafia and organized crime networks, as well as the continued cooperation with terrorist organizations like Al-Qaida, Albanian organized crime remains a serious threat to other Balkan states as well as Europe as a whole (Bamiatzis, 2018).

Organized crime can threaten the security of any nation, especially those with fragile democracies that lack experience in managing it, specifically in the Balkan and Eastern Mediterranean regions. According to the European Commission and the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO), political corruption is a serious and ongoing problem in Albania (Xhuvani, 2022). Political corruption among Albania's government has only exacerbated the issue of organized crime within the nation. Much of the corruption in Albania is due to the lack of political will due to the involvement of senior government officials in corrupt networks.

Transnational organized crime networks within Albania deal in the smuggling and trafficking of people, weapons, and drugs. The civil unrest in Albania since 1997 has created a foundation for a criminal market in small arms, light weapons, and dismantled weapon parts. Most of these small arms and light weapons (SALW) are trafficked to other European markets, but some have also appeared to be sold only on the domestic market within Albania (The Organized Crime Index | ENACT, 2022). Trafficking routes for SALW follow much of the same routes as those for the movement of migrants and other illicit commodities. Many of these routes inland, moving north from Albania through the Balkans, Greece from Turkey or other routes include seaborne routes to Western Europe. The market for SALW is controlled by Albanian organized crime networks in the country's northern region.

Albania remains a critical transit country for heroin, cocaine and cannabis. Albanian mafia-style groups have cemented links with cartels in South America, allowing them to import mass amounts of high-quality cocaine and access to complex global infrastructure. Albanian criminal networks not only take part in the trafficking of cocaine throughout Europe, but they also manage the storage and distribution and have consolidated their control over wholesalers and retail markets across Europe. Due to this, Albanian transnational organized criminals have consolidated control over a substantial share of Europe's cocaine trade. Albania is a massive transit nation for heroin trafficked to Europe through the Balkans from Turkey, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran. More specifically, Turkey is a key nation in dealings with heroin and the Albanian mafia. Turkey was an important nation for the production and trafficking of drugs, with many Albanian living in Turkey since the early twentieth century. Due to war and political oppression within Albanian, many migrants moved from Albania to Turkey. As a result, heroin collectives on Turkey's Black Sea Coast have facilitated cooperation among Albanian and Turkish organized crime, a relationship that will continue to persist. Trafficking routes for heroin maneuver through Turkey, then into Greece and the rest of the Balkans on their way to Western Europe. The Albanian mafia's success in moving its products west has been effective partly due to the preexisting Albanian communities in Greece, Germany, Belgium, and Switzerland (The Organized Crime Index | ENACT, 2022).

In addition to the trafficking of weapons and drugs, Albanian transnational organized crime groups also participate in the trafficking of people and smuggling of migrants across Europe. The Albanian mafia is notorious for exploiting migrants and human trafficking on the maritime route from Turkey to Greece. The impact of this sort of trafficking was initially only applied to the Balkan region. Still, over time the group's influence has spread into Western Europe, specifically with the trafficking of women and children to areas of demand such as Brussels and Paris. The United Kingdom's National Crime Agency has reported that the Albanian Mafia's engagement in human trafficking and the smuggling of migrants will remain a major concern for the Balkan region and the rest of Europe (Persi, Giacomo Paoli and Bellasio, Jacopo, 2017). The Albanian mafia's participation in human trafficking involves victims from

Albania and neighboring countries, typically by luring victims in with the promise of more money and better work in other Western European nations. According to the "Coalition All for Fair Trials", about 73 percent of those convicted for offenses relating to human trafficking in 2005 were of Albanian nationality (Trimcev, 2003). The promise of a better life and financial opportunities has been a tactic of traffickers to persuade individuals to believe and follow them. While the Albanian government, along with other Balkan nations and the European Union, continue to try and address the issue of human trafficking and migrant smuggling by Albanian organized crime groups, rampant corruption, political apathy, and the continuous flow of migrants in the region have hindered any reforms these formal institutions have tried to roll out.

Criminal Actors

The Albanian transnational organized criminal ecosystem is dominated by overlapping criminal networks and family mafia-style actors. Mafia-style criminal groups from Albania control criminal markets for human trafficking, human smuggling, small arms trafficking, and the trafficking of drugs. Albanian transnational organized crime groups have positioned themselves to be some of the most powerful criminal organizations in Europe. Albanian mafia-style groups diverge from other major mafias, like the Italian mafia, in that the Albanian mafia-style groups seldom identify themselves with names or symbols (The Organized Crime Index | ENACT, 2022). Albanian transnational organized crime groups, however, do exhibit structure and loyalty to a single leader. Albanian transnational organized crime has worked for hand in hand with state corruption, with one helping the other. Albanian transnational organized crime groups conspire with state-embedded actors, and these groups have influenced elections by pushing votes in one direction or another. These organized crime groups are helped by the political corruption of the state's government, and the persistent corruption allows for these groups' illicit activities to continue. Mafia-style groups in Albania have also established smaller crime networks that operate more domestically and that gravitate around the transnational groups. These networks maintain a fluid organizational and operational structure and are typically comprised of 3-4 members and are driven by any opportunity to profit (The Organized Crime Index | ENACT, 2022). These networks have become very violent but cooperate efficiently with corrupt judiciary officials and police as well with foreign actors, specifically the Sicilian mafia and Turkish organized crime groups. Albanian mafia-style organized crime groups are also known to have links with Kosovar and Montenegrin crime networks and hold a strong presence in the Netherlands, Belgium, and the United Kingdom. In the continuation of Albanian transnational organized crime, there is a worrying increase in the number of youth involved with various day-to-day criminal operations within the larger transnational organized crime network coming from Albania. Albanian transnational organized crime groups typically pose as a legal business as a front for their illicit activities and operations (Bamiatzis, 2018).

Crime Terror Nexus in Albania

Albania is the only Balkan country with a Muslim majority population. Albanian transnational organized criminal groups have developed global networks involved in transnational crimes such as drug trafficking, weapons, human trafficking, money laundering, and other illicit activities. Albanian TOC groups often come into direct contact with violent extremist offenders. Data has shown that Western Balkans is the European region with the highest concentration of returning foreign fighters from Syria and Iraq (Knights, Michael and Mello, Alexandre, 2015). Evidence has shown that they have traveled back home using forged or stolen travel documents, in some cases provided by criminal groups, and were aided by groups of smugglers operating across the Middle East and Europe.

The nation of Albania continues to have an unconsolidated democracy with inadequate checks and balances on its power structures, resulting in weak institutional capacity. Corruption and political apathy have minimized the state's ability to resolve the issue of Albanian transnational organized crime groups and their networks. However, due to pressure from the European Union, the Albanian government has placed the issue of corruption and organized crime high on its political agenda (Knights, Michael and Mello, Alexandre, 2015). However, resolving internal governmental issues is slow, and the political environment of Albania remains characterized by polarization, crises, and corruption. At the international level, Albania is a member of INTERPOL and is partnered with the European Judicial Network. The country has also signed agreements with EUROPOL and has joined various regional law enforcement networks. The country has also passed relevant organized crime treaties and has several significant extradition agreements; however, enforcement of this legal framework has fallen short (The Organized Crime Index | ENACT, 2022).

Methods of Counterintelligence

Non-state actors such as transnational organized crime groups (TOC) groups practice the counterintelligence (CI) methods of basic denial, adaptive denial, and covert manipulation, each one building on the previous in sophistication (Mobley, B.W., 2012). The foundational CI practice is basic denial and consists of activities that prevent the movement of information, either intentionally or unintentionally, from adversaries of non-state actors. Adversaries of non-state actors differ based on who the non-state actor is. Suppose the non-state actor is a TOC group from Albania. Its adversaries may include other TOC groups, domestic organized crime groups, the Albanian government, other nations' governments, or international organizations like NATO, EUROPOL, or INTERPOL. Activities of basic denial are also known as defensive counterintelligence and often focus on prohibited behaviors. Those within a TOC group may be prohibited from discussing the group's information with non-group members, prohibited from using electronic or telephonic media to discuss the group's activities, or maybe prohibited from associating with adversaries and their allies (Magee, 2011). Basic denial activities focus on preventing adversaries from planting spies or penetrating a group or organization's supply of recruits. Basic denial activities also thwart the adversary's attempts to recruit long-term group members to spy. CI vetting of recruits involves background investigations to ensure that new members are not associated with the adversary's security apparatus or with anyone or any organization that an adversary's intelligence service can exploit in a recruitment operation (Britovšek, 2018). Within the Albanian TOC and Mafia structure, the basic vetting of individuals is completed by examining the potential recruit's ethnic background. Many of these organizations are divided along ethnic lines with strong familial connections within the group. For TOC groups from Albania, there are strong familial and blood connections with their criminal groups work as a means of basic denial in preventing any potential outsiders with no connections into the organization. Typically, background checks ensure that new members of the organization do not threaten the organization, while continuous check-ups allow the organization to ensure current members are not spying. These check-ups might include an informal system for group members to report any suspicious or alarming behavior of other members. The subsequent investigation may also involve questioning members of the organization who are in contact with individuals suspected of espionage or questioning members directly about their alarming behavior (Britovšek, 2018). Education of non-state entities regarding the risk and penalties involved in spying for the enemy and compartmentalizing the organization into cells that stem the flow of information about operations are often effective basic denial techniques (Mobley, B.W., 2012).

Adaptive denial activities involve identifying the adversary's intelligence-collection methods and the TOC group's own CI vulnerabilities to improve the group's CI vulnerabilities (Mobley, B.W., 2012). Adaptive denial established the group's basic denial techniques that are not customized to a specific adversary. Activities of adaptive denial encompass investigation and interrogation of suspected spies, classifying detailed biographical information about all the group members, tracking group members' access to sensitive information, and conducting damage assessments in the case of the leakage of sensitive group information. More sophisticated adaptive denial methods utilize double agents to learn about the adversary's intelligence collection systems, utilize penetration to gain information about the adversary's operations, and identify spies planted in the group (Ilardi, 2009). The recruitment of human penetrations into the enemy's security apparatus allows the TOC groups to gain insight into the adversary's intelligence activities, personnel, and plans. A group could recruit an individual to penetrate the adversary's organization to identify the spies within the non-state actor's own group's ranks (Ilardi, 2009). This type of penetration is rarer but is very rewarding. Information from this kind of penetration would allow the organization to cut off any traitor's access to sensitive information or remove them from the group altogether. The non-state actor's group would benefit from an analysis of why, how, and when spies within their organization are recruited to improve the vulnerabilities that led to the leak in information. Within Albanian TOC networks, adaptive denial is highly practiced. Due to the diaspora in the region in the subsequent years following the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia, there remain many Albanians, Kosovans, and Bosnians that live outside their nation's borders and have formed communities in neighboring nations and throughout Europe. As result TOC groups from these nations are able to recruit and persuade individuals in other nations to penetrate another organization. For example, there is a significant number of Albanians that reside in Italy, therefore, if a leader of an Albanian TOC group wanted to infiltrate an organization such as the Sicilian Mafia, they may approach an ethnic Albanian that lives in Italy to try and worm their way into the organization. Additionally, the high amount of corruption in the Albanian government has made it easy for TOC groups to recruit individuals within their respective governments and has provided these groups with an intelligence advantage.

Covert manipulation is another method of CI that non-state actors like TOC groups can practice against their adversaries (Mobley, B.W., 2012).

Covert manipulation is the most sophisticated subprocess of CI, and its activities involve deceiving the adversary by providing false information about the non-state actor's group's behavior, plans, and personnel. Manipulation builds on the organization's basic and adaptive denial endeavor. Planting false information about the operations of a non-state entity is designed to deceive the adversary into wasting resources and time on fake leads or interrupting operations directed against the non-state actors' group.

Covert manipulation is also a part of offensive counterintelligence and typically requires a greater understanding of the adversary's intelligence collection system (Riley, 2015). A competent adversary will have multiple avenues for collecting information about the group, including open sources, interception and monitoring of the group's communications, and human penetrations. To deceive and manipulate a competent opponent, the TOC group must plant information into multiple avenues to corroborate the false information planted in the main disinformation channel (Riley, William S. Jr., 2015). The group may have to divulge some secrets to convince its opponents that that manipulative information is believable. A long-term campaign of effective deception requires that the non-state actor's group recruit a penetration of the adversary to provide feedback if the under what conditions the adversary truly believes the false information planted in their intelligence collection system. When a group receives feedback from a penetration source, the group can then alter and manipulate the opponent's behavior.

The three CI practices of basic denial, adaptive denial, and covert manipulation can be used by a non-state actor individually or collaboratively. How these CI methods are used and if they are used collaboratively depends on the non-state actor. For most TOC groups and terrorist organizations, the method of basic denial is common. With more sophisticated terrorist organizations, both basic denial and adaptive denial methods are employed. However, many TOC and terrorist groups do not use covert manipulation since it requires a higher level of coordination (Mobley, B.W., 2012). In many cases, just basic and adaptive denial procedures are sufficient for the survival of some non-state entities. Basic denial, adaptive denial, and covert manipulation are often designed to manage five intelligence threats. The five intelligence threats include penetration by the adversary's human spies; The adversary's collection of electronic, telegraphic, and face-to-face communications; Close observation of the group's activities by outsiders or locals who have contact with the group in its areas of operations or controlled territory; Passive observation of the group's activities and personnel when they travel through hostile territory controlled by either the opponent or an ally of the opponent; And exposure of the group's personnel and activities in the media (Mobley, B.W., 2012). For these methods of CI to be effective, non-state actors must also focus on the factors that shape CI methods.

Factors that Shape Effective CI Methods

Non-state entities like transnational organized crime groups or international terrorist organizations aim to utilize and improve their counterintelligence capabilities. The three main factors that shape non-state actors' CI capabilities include organizational structure, popular support, and access to the territory. In addition, non-state actors face issues maintaining the secrecy and operating effectively (Mobley, B.W., 2012). How non-state actors effectively practice CI methods is dependent upon these factors.

Non-state actors' organizational structure, specifically their command-and-control structure, determines how well leaders of either TOC groups or terrorist groups exercise control over their personnel. Non-state entities that utilize a tight command and control structure instead of a loose and decentralized command structure have better CI training and compartmentation (Wijninga, Peter, Oosterveld, Willem Theo, Galdiga, Jan Hendrik, and Marten, Philipp, 2014). Centralization of command allows group leaders greater control over group members and will enable leaders to implement specific training for the whole organization. Many organizations train their employees in basic CI skills to strengthen the overall security posture of their organizations. Such CI skills taught to company employees may include using passwords to access sensitive information online, locking away documents when not in use, and preventing employees from bringing any work home (How to Detect and Prevent Industrial Espionage: Definition & Best Practices, 2021).

A tight command structure enables group leaders to coordinate in sharing CI lessons learned across geographical and organizational units and coordinate complex counterespionage investigations. Non-state actors must have tight control over their group's security during social movements such as revolutions or the plotting of coups. A tight command structure makes it easier to maintain a more collective dissent. The strategy of compartmentation permits centralized command structures to restrict the flow of information within an organization to deter the disclosure of sensitive intelligence to those who are not authorized. For non-state actors to achieve compartmentation while avoiding fragmentation requires a higher level of coordination from the upper levels of the organization to make up for the reduced communication and information flow (Prunckun, 2019). Albanian transnational organized crime groups are highly characterized by strong inner discipline, through which severe punishment is used to deter members from deviating from internal rules. Fear is key in ensuring unconditional loyalty to the group within the Albanian mafia structure. Additionally, the family structure of

several Albanian mafia-style groups is based on blood ties, which works to restrict the number of group members and strengthens the bonds within the group. This close relationship between members of these transnational organized crime groups makes the task of infiltrating these groups almost impossible. Furthermore, the Albanian mafia families are organized at three to four or more levels, which aids these groups in maintaining organizational action capability even when some members are captured. Public support for non-state actors can significantly impact the effectiveness of its CI methods. Groups with popular support often receive more CI support from local populations (Ilardi, G. J., 2009). Those with local support and affection are more likely to win support in intelligence tasks such as identifying those spies for the non-state actors' adversaries.

Passive popular support includes a population's refusal to inform the adversary about a non-state actor, which facilitates the actor's group or organization's basic denial activities (Ilardi, G. J., 2009). Active popular support involves the public support in identifying outsiders and CI threats within an organization. Those non-state actors who gain popular support must be careful not to expose sensitive details about their organization while generating and maintaining support. Often non-state actors devote a substantial amount of time to building a public image to gain public and financial support. The proliferation of media technology like video sharing and the Internet's mass use has increased non-state actors' publicity dilemma. Non-state entities who reach out to the public, specifically through the media, risk revealing details about their group that an adversary could piece together and exploit (Ilardi, G. J., 2009). For Al Qaeda, its leader Osama bin Laden had frequently leaked valuable information regarding his health, operational intentions, and location in video interviews released to media outlets. It is important to note that there is a natural tension between popularity and secrecy for clandestine organizations. Non-state actors with increasing secrecy within their organizations begin to breed mistrust with the public (Mobley, B.W., 2012). Thus, for a non-state actor to effectively deploy CI methods, they must balance public support and secrecy of information.

The controlled territory is a geographical area with boundaries over which the non-state entity can impose its will. The controlled territory is the space that a non-state actor such as a TOC group or terrorist group can actively patrol and manage through the support of either state sponsors or additional non-state actors, like hired security guards, insurgents, or criminal organizations (Mobley, B.W., 2012). This aspect is rare for TOC groups as their operations stretch beyond borders, however, where their leadership primarily resides could be considered a controlled territory.

These capabilities allow non-state actors like terrorist organizations and organized crime groups to better manage their CI environment. Controlling a territory enables non-state actors to monitor those moving in and out of its territory, which aids the organization in identifying interlopers or possible insider threats (D'Agoût, 2020). Controlling territory is necessary for a non-state actor to effectively employ CI methods. Organizational structure, popular support, and access to territory are critical in shaping and influencing effective CI methods.

Conclusion

Prior to the turn of the 21st century, the world was primarily dominated by states. Still, non-state actors are of critical importance in national and international security in today's globalizing and multipolar world. Of these non-state actors, transnational organized crime networks and groups have become a key security threat in the national, regional, and global environment. Transnational organized crime groups threaten to destabilize basic societal, economic, and political institutions and values. The Balkan region that encompasses Albania, Kosovo, and Bosnia-Herzegovina has been plagued by conflict and instability since its civil wars of the 1990s. Today, the Balkan and Eastern Mediterranean region has reemerged with strategic

importance as the instability of nations in these regions are particularly susceptible to external malign influence by state and non-state actors. Increasingly, TOC and international terrorism are beginning to share organizational and operational features. Additionally, when it becomes advantageous, these groups will partner with each other. Transnational organized crime networks and groups have grown, and sophistication, and many major groups behave and assume the structure of secret organizations. Powerful Transnational organized crime groups develop according to the structures of their host countries, which is why these groups flourish in countries with more fragile political institutions. How transnational organized crime groups think and operate has made them successful. These groups take their illicit business ventures seriously, and understanding what these groups do, how they operate, and who they work with is critical in defeating them. By examining effective counterintelligence methods, this paper highlighted the strategic importance of transnational organized crime in the Balkan and Eastern Mediterranean region, focusing on Albania.

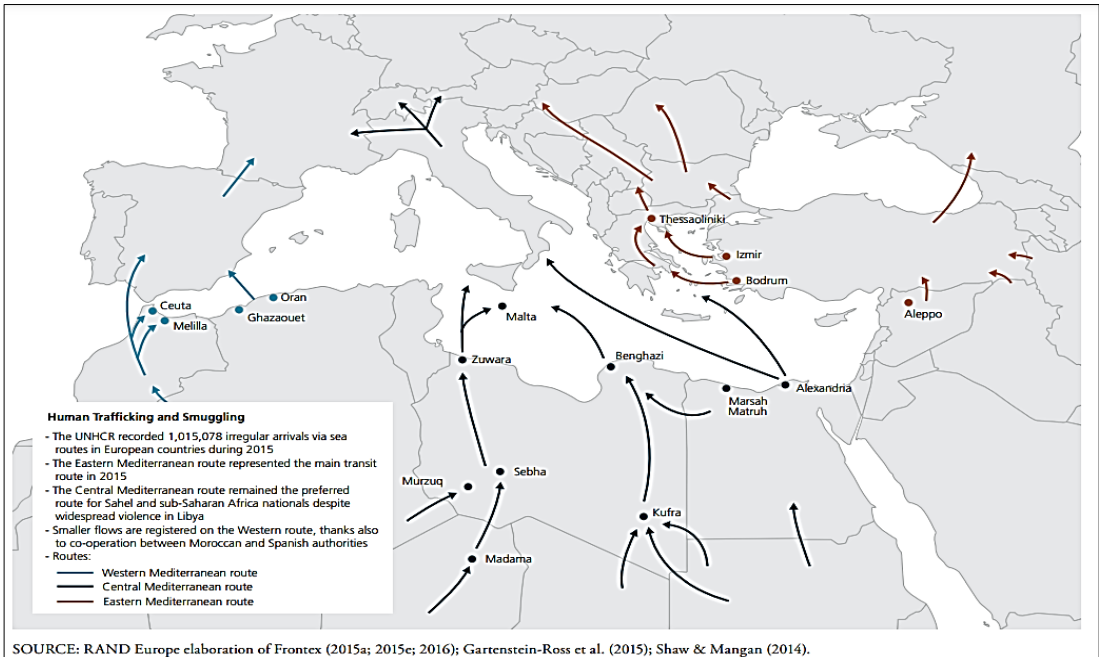


Figure no. 1. Overview of the mainland and sea routes used by human smugglers and traffickers to facilitate the movement of migrants, refugees, and trafficked individuals across the Mediterranean region

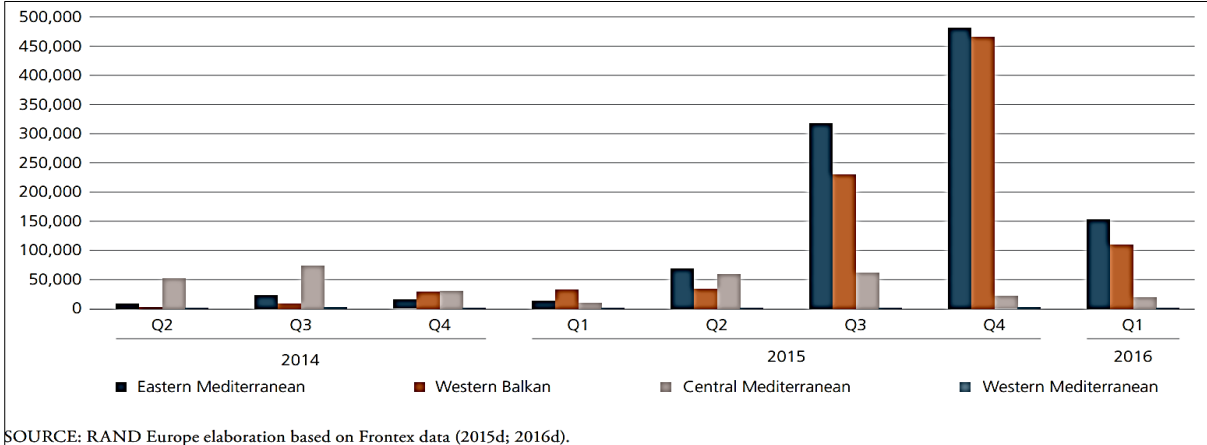


Figure no. 2. Frontex data on detections of illegal border-crossing between border-crossing points between 2014 and 2016

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SECTION II
MILITARY SCIENCE

