

## Chapter 2

# Neutralizing Radicalized Threat Networks, Disrupting WMD Illicit Traffickers and Targeting Corrupt Facilitators

David M. Luna

**Abstract** Neutralizing WMD Trafficking Networks and Facilitators: Criminal networks are not only expanding their operations, but they are also diversifying their activities, resulting in a convergence of transnational threats that has evolved to become more complex, volatile, and destabilizing. These networks also threaten U.S. interests by forging alliances with corrupt elements of national governments and using the power and influence of those elements to further their criminal activities. In some cases, national governments exploit these relationships to further their interests to the detriment of the United States.

TOC threatens U.S. interests by taking advantage of failed states or contested spaces; forging alliances with corrupt foreign government officials and some foreign intelligence services; destabilizing political, financial, and security institutions in fragile states; undermining competition in world strategic markets; using cyber technologies and other methods to perpetrate sophisticated frauds; creating the potential for the transfer of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) to terrorists; and expanding narcotrafficking and human and weapons smuggling networks. Terrorists and insurgents increasingly are turning to criminal networks to generate funding and acquire logistical support.

Presentation will outline the threats posed by global illicit trafficking networks including how crime-terror pipelines can be leveraged by transnational organized crime, terrorist groups, and facilitators that provide opportunities for the successful criminal transfer of WMD material to adversaries intent on threatening the welfare and security of the United States and NATO partners.

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D.M. Luna (✉)

Senior Director for National Security and Diplomacy, Anti-Crime Programs,  
Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL),  
U.S. Department of State, Washington, DC, USA  
e-mail: [LunaDM@state.gov](mailto:LunaDM@state.gov)

## 2.1 Illicit Trafficking Networks and WMD Proliferation

We live in a time of insecurity, from deadly infectious diseases such as the Ebola virus, to the proliferation of violent terrorist networks, to the destructive consequences of climate change, and of course, transnational crime, including the horrors that can result from weapons of mass destruction. These are grave threats to our collective security.

Shortly after the September 2014 NATO Summit, held in Wales, President Barack Obama addressed the nation on the threats posed by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). The President underscored how we must continue to confront the grave threats posed by terrorism, stating:

We can't erase every trace of evil from the world, and small groups of killers have the capacity to do great harm. That was the case before 9/11, and that remains true today. And that's why we must remain vigilant as threats emerge.

President Obama also sent a strong message that day to all threat actors and networks around the world who wish to harm Americans and our vital national security interests that those who threaten our country and the safety of Americans will be brought to justice. He said, "This is a core principle: if you threaten America, you will find no safe haven."

A corollary concern is the frightening reality of today's global threat environment consisting of the potential use of chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear weapons. In some cases, these WMD remain insufficiently safeguarded from theft or other illicit access.

There are still too many terrorists, criminals, and rogue facilitators driven to get access to these WMD; people and networks committed to unleashing these weapons upon scores of innocent people.

Past seizures of weapons-grade nuclear material indicate that such materials continue to circulate on the black market, where they can be bought by criminals and, potentially, transferred to terrorists.

The threat from nuclear terrorism is real. No country is exempt.

Over these next 3 days, distinguished scholars and participants at this conference will address related topics that are of critical importance to NATO and to the international community including the preparedness for nuclear and radiological threats.

These include developing methodologies to identify strategies to measure and reduce the potential risks of trafficking in weapons of mass destruction by illicit actors, and means, methods, and responses to detect, disrupt, and dismantle these threats before they inflict harm on our communities.

Finally, I will advance a novel proposition for the international community to ponder and perhaps begin to view some of today's violent radicalized groups such as ISIL and al-Qaeda affiliates as agents of mass destruction themselves.

## 2.2 The Origins of a Threat Network

Three years ago, a start-up venture was formed overseas. Much of its early day-to-day operations were small time, simply trying to do what all other nascent businesses try to do: make a name for itself, establish funding and resources, and acquire the talent and equipment necessary to succeed.

In the years since, it has become a global leader in its field, picking up techniques that modern businesses utilize to get ahead, adapt, and leverage market opportunities. Social media and innovative marketing have played a large part of its success—using Facebook and Twitter to amplify its early messages to followers around the world, as well as enable their operations across borders.

As for resources, forget crowdfunding websites—this organization has been able to amass assets in the billions of dollars over the past 3 years. Their adept use of networks, along with some profitable acquisitions, have left them more than adequately funded to take on further expansion.

Most importantly, they are diversifying across markets and borders—they have expanded their portfolio from local affairs to large-scale natural resource management, equipment acquisition and distribution, and dealing in illicit enterprises—from oil bunkering and kidnapping to cigarette smuggling and in trafficking in antiquities.

While there have been reports of some small use of WMD, we are still monitoring plans for larger-scale attacks, as are the citizens of Iraq, Syria, and the rest of the Middle East.

This is the story of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, folks. ISIL.

## 2.3 Agents of Mass Destruction

A merciless, ideologically-driven terrorist organization bent on creating an Islamic caliphate—from the Levant to Southeast Asia and across Africa—ISIL is in many ways the newest model of a threat network: an international organization that exports fear and exploits profitable opportunities to further its ideological and criminal goals.

Their ideology and violent acts are themselves repulsive as we saw in the litany of horrific crimes against the Yazidis in Iraq. Make no mistake, ISIL would not hesitate to maximize their propensity for further mass violence to the highest degree by unleashing a traditional WMD to murder large numbers of innocent people and continue their march of destruction.

This is why I would venture to add that, in my personal opinion, ISIL, and other terrorist groups, are agents of mass destruction that are killing innocent people, obliterating communities and holy sites, and committing mass atrocities that test the limits of our humanity, such as beheadings, crucifixions, rapes, and other forms of violence.

I do not think that is a stretch, frankly. After all, what is a “weapon of mass destruction”? For certain, when we think of WMD, we think of nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons or devices. But as we witnessed in Boston several years ago, a simple kitchen appliance, a pressure cooker, can also wreak havoc when criminally manipulated.

Suicide bombers can cause mass casualties and instill terror in communities.

Sick individuals that have contracted deadly viruses or pathogens can virtually become bioterror weapons as part of an outbreak.

Nothing today can be ruled out of the realm of possibility. If determined jihadists are willing to blow themselves up, why not do the same using a deadly virus inside their bodies to kill others through transmission?

A new day is upon us where terrorists like ISIL should be viewed as agents of mass destruction.

And ISIL is not alone.

Boko Haram, al-Shaabab, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, and others in other regions are similarly using mass fear and destructive violence to inflict murderous crimes in occupied lands as they march to destroy neighboring communities.

Unfortunately terrorist groups are not the only threat networks that the international community has to be concerned about.

Criminal organizations such as the Mexican drug cartels—from the Zetas to the Knights Templar to crime-terror groups such as the D-Company—have terrorized communities using mass violence and intimidation to further their criminal pursuits.

We must acknowledge that these networks of terror and criminality are often no longer just terrorists, and that organized criminal networks aren’t just made up of thugs. They are becoming hybrids, ruthless monsters, and agents of mass destruction.

This convergence of terror and criminality has far-reaching consequences and threatens the safety of world citizens especially when threat networks are determined to get their hands on WMD.

I ask you to consider these converging threats through a new prism in your research—how many of today’s threat networks such as ISIL are agents of mass destruction, that when converged with a thirst for conventional WMD and a penchant for vicious brutality, become a bigger threat altogether for all nations.

## **2.4 Illicit Trafficking: A Threat to the Legal Economy and Global Security**

Now let me address the dangers of traditional forms of WMD and the perils posed to the international community by illicit trafficking networks.

It is often said that where there is money to be made in illicit markets and the illegal economy, criminals will be very entrepreneurial to oversee and regulate the trading and selling of contraband.

This was certainly true for the A.Q. Khan network in Pakistan as it supplied North Korea and Libya with expertise, technology, and materials to their WMD program.

This brings me to the linkage with another theme of our discussion today.

As underscored earlier, we know that ISIL, Al-Qaeda, and other terrorist groups want to inflict as much damage as they can to innocent communities and their sworn enemies.

In fact, Osama bin Laden in his earlier years with al-Qaeda had stressed to his jihadist followers that it was a “religious duty” to seek and secure WMD as part of their campaigns of terror.

As potential customers and end-users of WMD, ISIL, al-Qaeda, and others, will remain interested in trying to obtain these powerful weapons to maximize catastrophic harm.

To achieve their nefarious terror goals, these groups will likely need to resort to illicit trafficking channels, where corruption, criminals, and black market facilitators come together across supply and demand vectors to obtain WMD.

Their success can only be achieved if we let our guard down.

In the past, we have seen how determined terrorists have obtained mustard and sarin gas, ricin, anthrax, missiles, and other WMD by exploiting corrupt or other vulnerable channels including in countries that have massive stockpiles of WMD or states that are on the verge of great instability and insecurity including Libya, Syria, North Korea, and states of the former Soviet Union.

## **2.5 An Unholy Trinity: Corruption, Criminality, and Terror**

As Dr. Louise Shelley, Director of the Terrorism, Transnational Crime, and Corruption Center (TraCCC), George Mason University, has enlightened us in her recent book “Dirty Entanglements: Corruption Crime, and Terrorism”:

The understanding of financial flows, the role of facilitators from the legitimate economy, and the centrality of particular routes and nodes are crucial to addressing the problem. By focusing only on the crime and terror components, while ignoring the centrality of corruption, it is not possible to effectively address the threat of WMD proliferation, or the possibility of attack. Analysis of the dirty entanglements will be crucial to preventing future attacks.

In a world of convergence, how difficult is our challenge to combat WMD proliferation amidst the entangled webs of corruption, criminality and terrorism?

First, when we realize that nuclear, biological, and radiological materials inhabit many sections of our lives, we begin to comprehend the complex task very quickly.

From hospitals to the smoke detectors in this room, the use of these materials can benefit our everyday lives. However, when used for malicious purposes, nuclear and radioactive materials pose a dangerous and disruptive threat to everyone.

It is because of the potential of this new black market niche that organized criminals have gravitated to seek profit based on demand.

This is basic economics: if there's a product in high demand, then there will be suppliers working to procure and sell it at a profit.

It just so happens that in this case, the product that terrorists and criminals want is closely guarded and extremely dangerous.

In Lyudmila Zaitseva and Kevin Hand's 2003 article "Nuclear Smuggling Chains," they describe the three main types of actors involved in the illegal movement of nuclear material: the suppliers, the intermediaries, and the end-users.

I want to focus particularly on the suppliers and intermediaries—let's call them facilitators, because they are the ones who enable the illicit use of nuclear material, and the ones that we should be most concerned about.

Facilitators can be almost anyone—from organized criminals who traffic hazardous material across borders, to radiology technicians in the hospital, to a corrupt general in a nation's army who wants to bolster his own paycheck.

Anyone who has access to nuclear materials has the potential to be a facilitator or a complicit actor in the illicit trafficking supply chain of WMD proliferation.

Following the break-up of the Soviet Union, we saw nuclear scientists from around the post-Soviet landscape smuggling material out of their labs and attempting to sell it on the black market.

They had suffered a loss of reputation and status in the new post-communist Russia, but most importantly they had lost a degree of financial security.

These scientists believed that there was a profitable market for nuclear materials that they could tap into. This perception holds as well for other facilitators—that there's a huge money-making opportunity out there in trafficking of WMD and hazardous materials.

These are among the challenges we face today.

As long as facilitators believe that there is a market for nuclear and radiological materials or weapons of mass destruction—regardless of whether there actually is—this will place even greater importance on the integrity of those tasked with guarding such materials.

The potential for corruption and blackmail is high: the stakes are higher.

As I mentioned earlier, ISIL was able to obtain a relatively small amount of natural uranium compounds through their rapid territorial expansion. Fortunately the IAEA has assessed that these materials do not present a significant safety, security or nuclear proliferation risk.

The thought, though, that this sadistic group even has access to and could gain access to more material is extremely concerning.

But, ISIL is not alone.

In the past decade or two, we have seen the Japanese cult Aum Shinrikyu use sarin gas on the Tokyo metro. There have also been unsubstantiated reports in the past of Chechen rebels planning to attack Moscow with WMD acquired in Russia's own black markets. And a few years back, there was a case of polonium-210 poisoning in the middle of London that targeted a former Russian spy.

Occasionally, law enforcement agencies across the international community have intercepted several illicit trafficking actors and networks that were attempting to smuggle nuclear and radioactive material through Georgia and other countries of the former Soviet Union.

And of course in places where there is war and instability as there has been recently in Libya, Iraq, and Syria, one has to wonder about whether or not some of the arsenals and stockpiles of WMD have been compromised and fallen into the hands of insurgent and terrorist groups during these conflicts.

In Syria, of course, according to reporting by the United Nations, “chemical weapons were used resulting in the killing of civilians, including many children”, and leading UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon to conclude that a war crime had been committed. Also, as noted earlier, a few weeks ago, it was reported that Islamic State members were engaging in chemical attacks on the battlefield when they dispersed chlorine gas.

This is the threat of WMD that illicit trafficking actors, networks, and facilitators pose to the security of all nations.

## **2.6 U.S. and International Efforts to Combat TOC and Threat Networks**

I’ve spoken a lot about the “doom and gloom” of what’s out there especially at the crossroads of radicalism and the global theater of insecurity and instability.

So what is the U.S. government doing to combat the menace of networks of terror, hostile states, hostile actors, and their criminal facilitators and terrorists who are bent on acquiring WMD to cause mass destruction and violence?

The United States takes these issues very seriously, as articulated in various national security strategies and presidential directives that help inform our efforts to detect and destroy the WMD capabilities and assets of those rogue states and non-state adversaries who threaten the peace and security of the international community by using these weapons, or before they are used.

Implementation of these strategies includes a whole-of-government approach related to military, law enforcement, diplomatic, and intelligence actions to combat terrorism, protect the homeland and our allies through deterrence, disarmament, counter-proliferation, interdiction of WMD materials, technologies, and expertise, and building and strengthening the interdiction capabilities and practices of our partners.

Some of my colleagues from the U.S. government who have greater expertise on WMD proliferation will be sharing more on our overall and current national and international efforts over the next 3 days.

At this time, however, I want to outline some of the diplomatic initiatives, tools, and capacities that the United States is using to address the convergence of threats in many of today’s hot spots and to combat the web of corruption and criminality related to illicit trafficking including WMD and to ensure that we keep the world’s most destructive weapons out of such destructive hands.

The Department of State has taken extensive bilateral measures to ensure nuclear security around the world, such as strengthening relations with law enforcement

agencies in countries in nuclear smuggling hotspots such as Eurasia, the Middle East, and Central Asia.

Multilaterally, we have also heeded the call to action, with regional groups from Africa to Asia and Europe to the Middle East convening to discuss this timely issue.

International organizations such as International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), NATO, INTERPOL and the G-7 have been leaders in combating global threats, including the proliferation of WMD, terrorism, and cyber attacks.

Collective action is vital. Efforts such as the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism have helped to strengthen cooperation on information-sharing, conducting joint tabletop exercises, technical assistance, and best practices in areas like nuclear forensics.

The Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) is an international partnership which aims to stop trafficking of weapons of mass destruction, their delivery systems, and related materials to and from states and non-state actors of proliferation concern.

We must also ensure compliance with international agreements and standards including the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NTP), the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), and the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC).

In implementing these important treaties and supporting the international organizations that monitor their enforcement, the United States has been working with partners to strengthen the capabilities of our allies to confront threats and prevent unauthorized transfers of WMD and missile technology, expertise, and material; imposing sanctions to discourage such transfers or the willful skirting of these obligations.

On combating cross-border illicit trafficking and criminal networks, the United States works closely with the international community, including INTERPOL, the IAEA, and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, to strengthen governments' capacities to prosecute those who facilitate the trafficking of nuclear materials and proliferation activities.

We know that effective investigations, prosecutions, and convictions are critical for keeping criminals, terrorists, and other non-state actors from acquiring WMDs and dangerous materials and technologies.

Within the Department of State, INL coordinates closely with other relevant important players including the Bureau of International Security and Nonproliferation (ISN), Bureau of Counterterrorism (CT), Bureau of Arms Control, Verification and Compliance (AVC), and others, to strengthen international cooperation against transnational threats including WMD proliferation and combating illicit networks and corruptive facilitators.

In support of U.S. law enforcement overseas, the Department of State is working with international partners to counter nuclear smuggling and the trafficking of nuclear and radioactive materials. This includes working with the network of Attaches from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), and other federal agencies, to coordinate with foreign counterparts, as well as international organizations to develop intelligence-based policing operations against suspected smuggling and trafficking networks.



The United States encourages international partners to strengthen capabilities to investigate smuggling networks, locate and remove trafficked material from the black market, and arrest perpetrators.

For example, at the 2012 Nuclear Security Summit in Seoul, 19 countries signed a Statement of Activity and Cooperation to Counter Nuclear Smuggling (CNS), and others announced steps to strengthen counter nuclear smuggling capacities. An updated CNS statement was signed in 2014 at the Nuclear Security Summit in The Hague, and 21 countries outlined steps taken to further strengthen capacities to counter smuggling of these dangerous materials.

Moreover, consistent with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1540 (UNSCR 1540), the United States is helping to advance a global response with committed states to implement measures aimed at preventing non-state actors from acquiring WMD, related materials, and their means of delivery; criminalizing WMD proliferation; strengthening border and export controls (including, for example, financial, transit, and transshipment); combating terrorist financing; and providing technical assistance to states that lack the capacity to implement UNSCR 1540 and properly secure WMD materials.

We look forward to continuing our work on these diplomatic initiatives, partnerships, and cooperative instruments around the globe to prevent, detect and target illicit trafficking of WMD, prohibit proliferation, and provide countermeasures to security sensitive related materials.

On combating illicit networks, recognizing the expanding size, scope, and influence of transnational criminal threats and its impact on U.S. and international security and governance, in July 2011 the White House released the *Strategy to Combat Transnational Organized Crime: Addressing Converging Threats to National Security*.

The TOC Strategy recognizes the threat posed by transnational organized crime and WMD proliferation. The TOC Strategy calls for the U.S. government and our international partners to work together to combat transnational illicit networks, and take that fight to the next level by breaking their corruptive power, attacking their financial underpinnings, stripping them of their illicit wealth, and disrupting their networks.

In support of the TOC Strategy, the U.S. Congress established the Transnational Organized Crime Rewards Program (TOCRP) in order to assist efforts to dismantle transnational criminal organizations and bring their leaders and members to justice.

This new TOC tool complements the Narcotics Rewards Program by offering rewards up to \$5 million for information on significant transnational criminal organizations involved in activities beyond drug trafficking, such as human trafficking, money laundering, trafficking in arms, counterfeits and pirated goods, and other illicit trade areas.

Already, we have announced a reward offer of up to \$5 million for Li Fangwei, a notorious proliferator of weapons of mass destruction-related technology to Iran. We anticipate that by rewarding informants who provide leads and tips that help hobble transnational criminal organizations, we can protect our citizens, economies, and homeland.

Finally, we must continue to strategically target the unholy trinity of transnational terrorism, crime, and corruption. We must robustly combat corruption across sectors and along the crime-terror continuum.

Over the years, corruption has been a key source of thefts of nuclear and radioactive materials from facilities of origin and related smuggling across borders.

There have been numerous reported cases of insiders stealing small amounts of highly-enriched uranium (HEU), weapons-grade plutonium, and other nuclear and radioactive material to smuggle out of their countries, traffick, and attempts to sell in black markets.

## **2.7 Peace and Security: Neutralizing WMD Trafficking Networks and Facilitators**

In closing, convergence defines the world's threat environment today.

We live in a world in which crimes such as nuclear and radiological material smuggling, terrorism, money laundering, and corruption are often interconnected, with profits from one illicit trade area used to advance further criminal complicity in other areas, and where bad actors will collude to harm communities, directly or indirectly.

As President Barack Obama has underscored: "Halting the spread of weapons of mass destruction is vital to ensuring a peaceful future."

Failure is not an option.

Vigilance, intelligence-sharing, preparedness, and cross-border cooperation can stop the facilitators and the networks from achieving catastrophic ends.

We must be cleared-eyed about the challenges before us and dogged in our efforts to address them.

The United States will continue to remain vigilant in defending the homeland forward against rising threats from transnational terrorism, crime, and corruption including combating nuclear terrorism and enforcing an international non-proliferation system.

My hope is that by the end of this workshop, we can have a productive discussion on the challenges before us and solutions that help the United States, NATO, and other committed international partners and multilateral organizations to more effectively combat the threat posed by the convergence of WMD smuggling and trafficking, illicit networks, and corrupt facilitators.

Through galvanized and sustained action across borders, we can degrade and dismantle today's networks of terror, hostile actors, and corrupt facilitators.

Through collective action and cooperation, we can help to secure WMD so that we can harness our energies to address other grave security threats around the world; keep freedom's light burning to secure the blessings of liberty to those that yearn for peace; and harness a more peaceful world for all of our children free of its deadliest weapons.

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