

Global Criminal Organizations

A geopolitical assessment

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Usually, the analysis regarding any relation between politics and criminal international organizations refers to *links, influences*, or even *mergers* between international criminal groups and political parties¹, or even single leaders.

This, of course, may usually be the truth, but the roots of this behaviour remain seldom analyzed.

And, traditionally, the state-of-the art studies are not interested in depicting the geopolitical relationships, and even the logic, behind the global criminal market and its relation with politics and, moreover, international politics.

I suppose, generally speaking, that we are still facing with the results of a “mafia change” which happened more or less at the same time in Colombia, with the *Plan Colombia*², in Peru, with the “autogolpe” by Alberto Fujimori in 1992, in Italy, with the bombings at the church of San Giorgio al Velabro³ in 1993, the killing of Salvo Lima, on the 12th march 1992, the killing of judge Antonio Borsellino on the 19th July 1992, and some days before, the assassination of judge Giovanni Falcone at Capaci.

Moreover, the “Organisatsyia”, the Russian Mafia, begins its mass penetration of the already privatized Russian banking system in the 1990-1993⁴, and Japanese *yakuza* gangs and the political turmoil in Tokio with the emergence of a new set of alliances in the same years.

So, a wide new geopolitics of mafia organizations reshapes the global landscape, redirecting the new flows of money in different places,

¹ V. James R. Richards, *transnational Criminal Organizations*, CRC Press, 1999.

² V. Gabriel Marcella, *Plan Colombia, some differing perspectives*, Strategic Studies Institute, Carlisle barracks, U.S. Army War College, 2001

³ Just to look for symbolism, San Giorgio al velabro is in front of the Cloaca Maxima, the main Sewer, and is reported to be the place where the two twins, Romolo and Remo, were found with the she-wolf. I think symbols are quite clear in this case

⁴ See F. Varese, *The Russian mafia. Private protection in a new market economy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001

and reshaping the balance of power both of politics and of the illegal networks.

New places of money laundering appear, and different proportions among new and old illegal organizations are set, with a tenuous alliance or even an enemy attitude versus new mafias and new legal circuits trigger a new set of geopolitical and financial choke points in the world market and in its political equilibrium.

Simply speaking: new mafias are enormously rich and liquid, and old ones are looking after a political turmoil caused by the collapse, after the breakthrough of financial globalization, of the welfare state and the subsequent tacit relationship between mafias and the political elites.

Collapsing welfare states can envisage two options: either they crash their national mafias and seize their assets, but the money is already gone away: the Mafias have got the message of financial global markets some years before the politicians; or they cut the old mafias in two pieces. The one they still need and the one they don't want anymore see in town.

This local mafia is redirecting its interests not to the National State, but is strongly interested with regional politics. The Berlin Wall has crushed, so this small and local mafia has no need of playing its anticommunist or right-winged cards.

The old tactics of the Italian State vs the pre-globalized *Cosa Nostra* was more or less the same: playing one *cosca* against the other, and getting data and crushing the *cosche* after they were seen as *perdenti*, "losers"⁵.

Many heroes lost their lives in this hard and soulless game: the killing of General Carlo Alberto dalla Chiesa, the winner against the old "Brigate Rosse" and his wife Setti Carraro in 1982, they were the victims of this rapid *renversement* of mafia alliances which paved the way to the ultimate globalization of *Cosa Nostra* and the abrupt breach of the old treaty between the mafia and the Italian State.

Further victims of the mafia were judge Ciaccio Montalto, a Trapani attorney who was studying the new dislocation of the old mafia families in the west, in the heroin and smuggling routes from Trapani to the North of Italy and Spain, and in the same year Mario d'Aleo, a captain in the Carabinieri. All in the 1983.

When the Democrazia Cristiana loses for the first time the leadership in the government, with the nomination of Bettino Craxi as the head of Government.

⁵ From a talk with the author of this paper with Jidge Pierluigi Vigna, former head of Direzione Nazionale Antimafia, held in Florence the 23rd January 2007

Cosa Nostra did not need any coverage for the big affairs in Italy by the political system (there were no more big affairs here, while the money laundering was in the new East or in the USA); the political elite did not need the Mafiosi to collect votes, because the new east-west equilibrium was in rapid transformation, and the old parties knew that had to be transformed bottom-down⁶.

This is the line of events coming from the second half of the Eighties, in Italy, and going till the “change of mafias” in the first half of the Nineties.

After this globalization of crime, we have in Italy “local mafias” vying for the money given by “regions”, “boroughs”, and they press the political system mostly by means of their leverage in the non-political elite.

Bankers, industrialists, financiers, even journalists are the reference to rich but still local mafias for a relation with central politics.

Local mafias look after local politicians, with no or small appeal in the roman circles, while big international pressure groups, with some hints to money laundering activities, look after national big politics⁷.

So, we have now a new structure for the relation between International criminal organizations and political elites: the *Circle no. 1*, with grey and white money laundered abroad coming in disguise into Italy, usually buying state bonds and shares.

This flood needs a convenient climate for investment, a significative liquidity in the system, both of legal or illegal origins, an easy way to go outside as soon as possible when things are going bad or there is a new better operation out of Italy⁸.

In this system, big business and big money laundering activities are one and the same: there is no real possibility, even in the legal framework of FATF regulations, to really penalize this inflow.

The other way round: small politics, at the local level, needs small mafias more than ever. *Circle no. 2*.

Because of the regionalization of most of the main taxes, electing small politicians in the local area of the mafias is, for ‘ndrangheta, sacra

⁶ See Alexander Stille, *Excellent cadavers, the mafia and the death of the first Italian republic*, New York, Vintage books, 1996

⁷ Innodestly, see Marco Giaconi, *Le Organizzazioni Criminali Internazionali. Aspetti geostrategici e economici*, Roma, Franco Angeli Editore, Collezione Centro Militare di Studi Strategici, 2001

⁸ See R.T. Naylor, *Wages of Crime: black markets, illegal finance, and underworld economy*, Cornell University Press, 2005

Corona Unita in Puglia, Stidda and Cosa Nostra in Sicily, Camorra in Naples a real bonanza.

But there is a natural link between local politics and national politics, big party bosses are elected in regions and boroughs, not on the Moon.

The solution is: to create a kind of *political entrepreneurship* where, usually, in their companies, big politicians covertly own some shares, while the managerial responsibility is on the shoulders of a new class of managers, a class chosen both by the local political elite and the mafia small bosses⁹.

This new situation may explain the strict autonomy held by some powerful politicians in the local arena, and their inability to ascend at the national level.

And this may also explain the incredibly high market protection given to some firms at the local level.

Both local mafias and small politicians have a common goal: to protect their constituency, either of consumers or of voters, from the political and industrial competition from outside¹⁰.

Mafia means, strictly speaking, a kind of *militarization of protectionism either political or commercial*.

This may create some contradiction, in the globalized market today. Old state monopolies had their good interest in paying, like the newly founded firms in post-Soviet Russia, a “protection” given by Mafiosi.

Legal monopolies and cartels met the needs of illegal monopolies and violent cartels.

The “mafia wars” from their beginning after the death of Vito Cascio Ferro in 1943, who redirected the “Onorata Società” from their strong relation with Partito Liberale and the right-winged antifascism to the new and promising Democrazia Cristiana¹¹, are wars for the monopoly of commerce or every legal or illegal activity within a closely defined territory.

But why “mafia wars”, by the way? If they already have their area, so why bother?

⁹ See Commissione Parlamentare di Inchiesta sul fenomeno della Mafia e sulle associazioni criminali similari, Seduta di Martedì 13 Luglio 1993, Presidente Luciano Violante, pag. 2217, audizione del collaboratore di Giustizia Pasquale Galasso.

¹⁰ See on this subject Leone Zingales, *Il padrino ultimo atto. Dalla cattura di Provenzano alla nuova mafia*, Roma, Aliberti, 2006

¹¹ See John Dickie, *Cosa Nostra: a History of Sicilian Mafia*, Palgrave Macmillan, London 2005

In fact, “mafia wars” erupted for *new businesses*, not clearly located in predefined mafia boroughs, and moreover for *gaining new protections* when political landscape changed.

But we have to take due notice of the inside wars within the single *cosche*, where newcomers and young challengers gained some unclear support among other *cosche* and tried to outset their boss¹².

But now this process is regionalized, referred mainly to party groups, personalized (as the whole political communication today) and fixed in post-modern *cosche* where the local politician, the mafia boss, the “grey” or even “white” entrepreneurs, some bureaucrats coalesce and create a new kind of mafia¹³.

Not the white collar mafia, which works without relevant illegal pressures in the global financial centres, not even the “black” mafia, asking for small businesses, which are usually better conducted in the open air, but a new illegal grouping which we should define better¹⁴.

¹² See Shawcross and Young, *Mafia Wars*, New York, harper & Collins, 1988

¹³ See for the business climate surrounding the nuova mafia, Lino Abbate, Peter Gomez, *I Complici. La latitanza di bernardo Provenzano 43 anni di mafia, politica e affari*, Fazi, Milano, 2007

¹⁴ See Pietro Grasso, Francesco la Licata, *Pizzini, veleni e cicoria. La mafia prima e dopo Provenzano*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 2007