

# The NATIONAL STRATEGY FORUM REVIEW

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## **The Case of Scampia and Secondigliano, Italy**

*By Egon Donnarumma*

Known as the “anti-state” or simply the “system,” the “Camorra” dominates the city of Naples, Italy. The Neapolitan equivalent of Sicily’s Mafia operates a multibillion dollar a year enterprise ranging from international smuggling to street level crime to providing material support to terrorists. The epicenter of the system is the neighborhoods of Scampia and Secondigliano, called the Red Zone due to the amount of power that Camorra exerts over the area.<sup>1</sup>

### **Fertile Conditions**

The Camorra came on the international stage in the early 1990s. The Sicilian Mafia had traditionally been the most powerful of the organized crime groups in Italy, but following the assassination of two prominent anti-mafia judges, Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino, in 1992, it faced an unprecedented level of crackdowns by law enforcement.<sup>2</sup> This created the opportunity for the Camorra to fill the void for international drug trafficking, and subsequently the bulk of drug trafficking shifted from Sicily to Naples.<sup>3</sup>

The conditions in Naples itself, particularly Scampia and Secondigliano, have allowed the Camorra to continue to operate on the international level. Following the earthquake of 1980, thousands migrated to the public housing complexes known as the Vele di Scampia (Sails of Scampia). This influx exacerbated already existing problems of poverty, drugs, and street crime, in which an estimated 60,000 residents were now living in the complexes seriously lacking public services, not even a single police station initially.<sup>4</sup> The lack of commercial development coupled with extremely high unemployment made this a perfect area for criminal enterprise. A deep suspicion of outsiders, including police, along with the brute force the Camorra was able to exert over the population provided security for the “camorristi” to conduct criminal activity openly throughout the housing complexes.<sup>5</sup> Of the almost twenty million tons of cargo the Port

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<sup>1</sup> “Gangs, guns and bins.” *Sunday Telegraph*, June 15, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> <http://faculty.ed.umuc.edu/~jmatthew/naples/vele.htm>.

<sup>5</sup> “Gangs, guns and bins.” *Sunday Telegraph*, June 15, 2008.

of Naples handles each year,<sup>6</sup> an estimated 60% evades customs checks altogether.<sup>7</sup> This means that the Port of Naples has become the gateway to Europe for international smuggling.

### **Insecurity Flows**

The combination of these conditions has given rise to a wide breadth of criminal enterprises. The sale of fake designer clothes from Chinese manufacturers is a rapidly growing industry for Camorra, reaching France, Britain, Germany, and the United States. Of the 50,000 shipments of contraband that pass through the Port of Naples each year, 99% of them are believed to be coming from China.<sup>8</sup> It has been suggested that the trade may become more profitable than drug trafficking.<sup>9</sup>

Some observers claim no drugs enter the European market without first passing through Secondigliano.<sup>10</sup> Drug trafficking as well as street dealing, both handled by the single organization, is a U.S. \$20 billion a year industry. A trafficking ring exposed in September 2010 shows a network spanning from Naples to Nigeria, Tanzania, Brazil, China, and Turkey. This network employed couriers as mules to smuggle cocaine, heroin, and marijuana into Italy.<sup>11</sup> Cocaine generally enters Naples from Colombia and Venezuela via Nigeria. Likewise, heroin from Afghanistan passes through Nigeria to Naples.<sup>12</sup> Another route originates in Turkey and enters Italy from ports in Albania and Kosovo.<sup>13</sup> Once they pass through the port and enter the safe havens of Secondigliano and Scampia, those drugs that are not put straight onto the streets are moved throughout Italy as a whole or into northern Europe, specifically France through at least one known drug route called the Apennine Range.<sup>14</sup>

The drug trade is financed in part by cash, but also with weapons. Most were smuggled into Italy from the former Yugoslavia and other Warsaw Pact countries especially in the early 1990s. During the civil war in Algeria, the Islamist terrorist organization, Armed Groups, linked with Camorra to use drug smuggling routes in reverse to ship weapons from Slovakia through Naples to Algeria.<sup>15</sup> During the conflict, “investigators seized at least a ton of high explosives, 613,000 rounds of ammunition and 175 missiles, artillery pieces or other bits of ‘long-range military weapons.’”<sup>16</sup> According to the then Italian Defense Minister Salvo Ando, even sophisticated weapons such as the American-made Stinger anti-aircraft missile “are quite easily found on the market,” and Mafia bosses “will certainly have no difficulty obtaining them.”<sup>17</sup>

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.worldportsource.com/ports/ITA\\_Port\\_of\\_Napoli\\_1073.php](http://www.worldportsource.com/ports/ITA_Port_of_Napoli_1073.php).

<sup>7</sup> “The Chinese Godfathers: Gangs fill void as mafia goes to jail.” *The Daily Record*, June 30, 2010.

<sup>8</sup> “In Naples, Sopranos’ scarier cousin.” *Christian Science Monitor*, June 11, 2007.

<sup>9</sup> “Italy’s Mafia thrives in global financial meltdown.” *Associated Press*, April 25, 2009.

<sup>10</sup> Ed Vulliamy. “Observer Review.” *The Observer*, October 5, 2008.

<sup>11</sup> “Drug Trafficking Gang Busted.” *ANSA*, September 9, 2009.

<sup>12</sup> “Italy: Nigerian ‘ex-slaves’ help bust drug trafficking ring.” *Adnkronos International*, Rome, September 7, 2010.

<sup>13</sup> “Heroin from Albania and Kosovo Seized in Italian Drugs Bust.” *ANSA*, October 3, 1999.

<sup>14</sup> “Nigeria; Popular Drug Lord, Iyiola Arrested in Italy.” *Africa News*, August 23, 2008.

<sup>15</sup> “France warns Europe on terror; Arms traffic tied to many nations.” *Washington Times*, February 7, 1995.

<sup>16</sup> “Mafia’s power, riches grow through weapons trade; E. Europe giving mob missiles, uranium, more.” *Dallas Morning Star*, November 1, 1993.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

The most troubling result is the emerging relationship between Camorra and terrorist groups that exchange drugs for both weapons and assistance entering Europe. In February 2003, 28 Pakistani terrorists were arrested in a Camorra safe house in downtown Naples.<sup>18</sup> “800 grams of explosives, detonators, fuses, detailed maps of Naples, 100 mobile phones and documents on falsifying passports” were seized.<sup>19</sup> It is alleged that Camorra not only provided the terrorists with a safe house, but may also have procured the explosives they had planned to use.<sup>20</sup> The suspected target was Sir Michael Boyce, Britain's Defense Chief of Staff, who was scheduled to visit Naples the month after the arrests.<sup>21</sup> In October 2010 a French-Algerian man was arrested in Naples with a bomb-making kit under a French arrest warrant in connection with two raids of suspected Islamist militants in France.<sup>22</sup>

### **Challenges to State Security**

The Camorra directly challenges state authority through violence and corruption. At the street level, illicit sale of cigarettes and other goods is tolerated by authorities under an “air of casual illegality.”<sup>23</sup> With little in the way of commercial infrastructure and social services, it functions as the only viable economic organization in these neighborhoods.<sup>24</sup> It also serves as a welfare agency, in essence, by providing care for families of any member who ends up in prison.<sup>25</sup> This tightens its grasp on the neighborhoods by making the population dependent on its services, which pushes out state services, thus further integrating Camorra into society. Following the global economic crisis, organized crime in Italy is one of the few businesses with liquidity and is lending lots of money (although with extremely high interest rate) to businesses.<sup>26</sup>

### **National and International Responses**

Camorra's activities have experienced pushback from the Italian government. Military responses have been provoked on more than one occasion. In 2008 a crisis developed in the city following the buildup of trash on the streets largely blamed on Camorra interests in the illegal waste disposal business filling up garbage dumps.<sup>27</sup> Soldiers were sent in to restore calm and start moving the trash. Later that same year, street violence induced a military response of 500 elite paratroopers to provide security in the surrounding towns of Naples.<sup>28</sup> Unfortunately, Camorra

<sup>18</sup> "Italy charges 28 Pakistanis with global terrorism." *Irish Times*, February 1, 2004.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> "Italy: Police seek more evidence at Naples home of arrested Pakistanis." *La Stampa*, February 3, 2003.

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/terrorism-security/2010/1005/France-arrests-12-as-concerns-grow-about-homegrown-terrorism>.

<sup>23</sup> "Southern Discomfort; Corruption, Joblessness Plague Lower Italy's Economy." *Washington Post*, August 20, 1995.

<sup>24</sup> "Gang warfare, Camorra style." *Toronto Star*, February 20, 2005.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/02/28/AR2009022801972.html>.

<sup>27</sup> "World: Street battles rage in Naples over rubbish: Berlusconi's hardline decision to open new dumps for piles of rotting garbage sparks angry protests." *The Observer*, May 25, 2008.

<sup>28</sup> "500 paratroops fail to bring peace to mafia stronghold." *Daily Telegraph*, October 9, 2008.

and its stronghold in Scampia and Secondigliano receive little attention outside of Italy with the exception of the 2008 release of the film *Gomorra*.

### **Impact on the United States**

The biggest threat to the United States stemming from this part of the world over the long term is the increased probability of a catastrophic terrorist attack. If left unobstructed, terrorist groups can continue to use Naples as a point to safely enter Europe, which may eventually result in a major terrorist attack. The U.S. should focus on enhanced cooperation with the EU to increase interdiction efforts in the Mediterranean to cut down on smuggling (in this area it may be facilitated by the fact that U.S. Navy has a base just outside of Naples). A partnership of Italian and American intelligence operations to track terrorist activity in Naples would also be in both countries' interest.

The last point of concern would be for American businesses. The implications of facing organized crime elements must be considered when deciding to locate in Naples or interact with Naples based industry. While this does not apply to every industry, those involved with shipping and especially waste disposal should be aware of the likelihood of crossing paths with elements of the Camorra and consider the possible consequences.

Realistically, the criminal elements of the Camorra are so embedded in society that they are unlikely to go away anytime soon. Thus, it may be advisable to focus both efforts and resources on anti-terrorism to address what is perceived to be the most imminent of the security threats.

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