Combining threat and vulnerability approaches to organised crime?

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“Since the plotters were flexible and resourceful, we cannot know whether any single step or series of steps would have defeated them. What we can say with confidence is that none of the measures adopted by the U.S. government from 1998 to 2001 disturbed or even delayed the progress of the al Qaeda plot. Across the government there were failures of imagination, policy, capabilities, and management. The most important failure was one of imagination. We do not believe leaders understood the gravity of the threat.”

(National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, 2004: 9)
Overview

1. Criminal analysis and organised crime policy
2. Risk, threat, harm and vulnerability
3. Tools for assessing organised crime
4. Added value vulnerability approach?
5. Conclusions
1. Criminal analysis and organised crime policy

a. Why analysing organised crime?

b. What do we need/want to know?
1a. Why analysing organised crime?

Organised crime is a key concern for many policy makers. To give an appropriate response to the phenomenon, policy makers need to be informed:

- preventive and/or repressive action
- operations, tactics and strategy

Analyses are there to produce knowledge and understanding, not just information.

Analyses are tools to set priorities.
1b. What do we want/need to know?

Knowledge about the phenomenon includes:

more than reporting on law enforcement activity: (in)significant law enforcement action can “create” (in)significant phenomena;
information to think ahead about possible future developments (more than the report on last year’s situation);
not only numbers of criminals, groups or activities, but a ranking of these issues to show differences in dangerousness, seriousness, ...; and
an understanding of the risk/threat posed by organised crime, the harm caused by it and the vulnerability of the environment.
2a. Risk, threat, harm and vulnerability

**Risk** is the chance of something happening that will have an impact upon objectives.

**Threat** arises when a source of risk has an intent to occur or has the capability to do so.

**Harm** is the damage occurring should a threat be realised.

**Vulnerability** is an aspect of the environment offering opportunities to the threat to cause harm.
2b. Risk, threat, harm and vulnerability

- THREAT (criminals)
  - RISK
  - VULNERABILITY (environment)
  - HARM (society)
3. Tools for assessing organised crime

Several methodological tools (best practices) exist to make « useful » organised crime assessments, focusing on:

a. Threat
b. Vulnerability
c. Harm
d. Risk
3a. Threat analyses

Focus is on measuring the **intent** and the **capability** of **criminals (groups)** and rank them according to their « dangerousity » (e.g. Canadian « Sleipnir » analysis, European OCTA,...).
3b. Vulnerability studies

Focus is on assessing the *weak points in the (legal) environment* which *could be exploited by organised crime*. (No law enforcement bias):

Vulnerability studies of economic sectors;
Environmental scans linking political, economic, social, technological and environmental (PESTE) evolutions to (future) crime opportunities;
Scenario studies about key uncertainties;
Crime proofing studies about legislation or products;
…
3c. Harm assessments

Focus is on the *consequences* (harm) caused by organised crime.

Ranking of crime *phenomena/groups/vulnerabilities* in order of the harm they (might) cause.

Difficult and subject to debate:

- **what** is harm (economic, emotional, physical, intellectual, political...)?
- **how** to measure and compare (and rank)?

Examples: UK approach (NCIS and SOCA)
3d. Risk analyses

Focus is on the analysis of the risk, thus linking assessments on *threat, vulnerability and harm*.

A complete risk assessment model:

combines information on *criminal activities* (threat), about the crime *opportunities* of the environment (vulnerabilities) and about the *impact* (harm) of organised crime; and

offers knowledge to policy makers which is not only based on law enforcement activity to set *priorities for both prevention and repression*. 
4a. Added value vulnerability approach?

- « Danger » project (appraising the dangerousness of organised crime)
- Partners: Kuleuven, Rotterdam University and Ghent University
- Financed by Science Policy Belgium
- Does the environmental approach (vulnerability studies) has a added value to the perpetrator approach (threat)? Can both approaches be integrated?
4b. Added value vulnerability approach?

1. Methodology:
   How can the « dangerousness » of perpetrators and/or groups (threat) be measured?
   How can the vulnerability of economic sectors be measured?

2. A threat study on perpetrators/groups active in transport, import-export, catering (political?) sector and a vulnerability study of these sectors

3. Comparison of the results of the studies (added value vulnerability?) and development of a methodological tool in which both approached are integrated