

# CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES ACROSS NATO'S GREATER SOUTH

Migration, Trafficking, Extremism, and Instability

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## OPEN Publications (2017-??) NATO's Greater South

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*OPEN Contributing Author:* Matthew Conway<sup>1</sup>  
Steven A. Zyck<sup>2</sup>

*OPEN Managing Editor* [Robin Barnett](#)

*OPEN Editorial Review Board:* David Beckwith  
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**[natocde@act.nato.int](mailto:natocde@act.nato.int)**

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Conway is an independent researcher and current US Presidential Management Fellow. His research focuses on violent the nexus of conflict and development.

<sup>2</sup> Steven A. Zyck is an independent researcher as well as a Senior Fellow with the Centre for Security Governance, Canada, and an Associate of the Overseas Development Institute, UK, and an associate faculty member at the Center for Conflict and Humanitarian Studies at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, Qatar. He is the Founder and Editor Emeritus of *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development*.

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## Executive Summary

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NATO and its partners, as a part of discussions related to the Alliance's efforts to promote peace and security in its broader neighbourhood, have [increasingly focused on NATO's "Southern Flank."](#) In the following report, the authors argue that this [primarily military term](#) is likely to be off-putting to many current or would-be NATO partners, such as foreign ministries, international organisations, and civilian stakeholders, hindering the goals of ["projecting stability"](#) and risking a near-exclusive focus on threats and risks. Furthermore, this report demonstrates how the term "Southern Flank" does not fully capture NATO's challenges. For example, issues like trafficking and migration [originate in far-flung areas](#) including West Africa, Latin America, and Central Asia, which may not be part of the Southern Flank as currently conceived by NATO. In suggesting the use of a less heavily value-laden and military-centric term like the "Greater South", the authors point out that challenges emanating from the Greater South also present opportunities to Alliance states that may bolster NATO's strategic objectives.

The following observations and findings are based on a review of the pertinent literature from academics, research institutions, governments, and various international organisations (IOs) and international nongovernmental organisations (INGOs). They also emerge in part from the authors' combined twenty years of research experience working on and researching issues ranging from civil-military interaction to post-crisis stabilisation and humanitarian action in contexts as diverse as Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Lebanon, Somalia Syria and Yemen for governments, UN agencies, the World Bank, INGOs, NATO's former Civil-Military Fusion Centre and others.

### Challenges and Opportunities in NATO's Greater South

Some of the most immediately pressing challenges emanating from the Greater South include migration and trafficking in drugs, guns, persons as well as conflict and violent extremism. These inter-related issues thrive amidst corruption and low state capacity, prevent economic growth, and facilitate instability and extremism. This report explores these challenges and demonstrates (i) their intersecting nature; (ii) how typical approaches to addressing these issues, including increased border control and [military responses](#), can displace the challenge and plant the seeds of future instability elsewhere; and (iii) that the various challenges facing NATO may be reconceptualised as opportunities rather than purely as threats.

With regard to migration, in 2015, [1.2 million people applied for asylum in Europe, 66.2% of whom were male](#) according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM). This may pose social stability challenges not only in assimilation and cultural differences relating to [gender relations](#) but also in the fact that most young, male migrants, many of whom are single, will be jobless for a year or two following arrival. However, with

approximately 84% of incoming migrants [under 34 years old](#), the host economy [may ultimately benefit economically](#) from migration. The International Monetary Fund (IMF), for instance, estimates annual output to [increase by 0.1% in the EU and 0.3% in Germany](#) by the end of 2017.

Trafficking also poses challenges as well as opportunities. Trafficking from the Greater South as well as closely-related corruption are believed to cost Europe nearly €300 million annually. In Mali, endemic drug trafficking and corruption played a role [in instability and an ensuing coup in recent years](#); illicit trafficking in natural resources in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has fuelled conflict for decades. As most illicit trafficking [is associated with the Greater South](#) and is [facilitated by](#) weak economies and corruption, development activities [encouraging licit commerce](#) and [economic development](#) would benefit NATO member states and the Greater South. There are, as the full text outlines, opportunities to better economically link countries across the Greater South with one another as well as with NATO members.

Some of this study's most interesting findings, however, do not address migration and trafficking in isolation but rather their inter-relationships and their ties to conflict and violent extremism. For instance, the [Geneva Centre for Security Policy states](#) migrant smuggling "has particularly strengthened groups with a terrorist agenda, including the Islamic State," and that taxation on migration and illicit trafficking is 'possibly now the largest and most easily accessible finance opportunity for both organised crime networks and armed groups'. Migrant smugglers often overlap with criminal 'industries and traffic drugs, weapons and other goods alongside people. A [joint Europol and Interpol investigation underlines](#) the extent of trafficking networks and their overlap with terrorist organizations, noting migrant smuggling was worth an estimated \$5-6 billion dollars in 2015 and organised criminal enterprises facilitated travel for 90% of migrants bound for the EU.

Furthermore, particular policy responses to issues like migration have been linked with increased instability. For instance, attempting to simply contain migration in the Greater South – rather than tackling underlying causes of migration such as conflict and poverty – may lead to a series of adverse effects. For instance, those attempting to migrate to NATO member countries in a context of more heavily secured borders are increasingly likely to make use of more capable [smugglers and human trafficking](#) rings which are associated with armed and extremist groups in places like [North Africa and the Sahel](#).

Likewise, border control measures aimed at preventing North-South migration may have displacement effects, essentially driving migrants to urban centres in middle- and upper-income countries in Africa and the Middle East. The growth of urban slums heavily populated by young and unemployed or under-employed men in these locations can have major implications for social cohesion (e.g., ethnic, tribal, or religious tensions) as well as

political stability. Hence, the question for NATO is not only how to tackle the sorts of challenges outlined in this paper, but also to consider how its responses may produce unintended secondary consequences in the medium term.

### **Recommendations and Conclusion**

The available research shows that typical security threats emanating from the Greater South, including migration, trafficking, and their interwoven relationships with conflict and extremism, are [more dynamic than initial analysis](#) would assume. Each threat poses [potential benefits](#) for certain NATO member countries if approached correctly. Notably, these approaches entail neither grand political or development agreements – such as large aid projects implemented quickly to extend state authority quickly – [nor military crackdowns](#), as both may increase conflict and [displace challenges](#) to other regions. Rather, sustained engagement in social and economic conditions, ranging from government capacity building campaigns to [development investment funds](#), are the most promising and evidence-backed approaches to reducing the challenges emanating from the Greater South.

In seeking to confront these challenges, NATO will likely have most success by collaborating with United Nation (UN) agencies and regional bodies including the European Union, the Economic Community of West African States, and the Gulf Cooperation Council, especially in coordinating security and development (e.g. trade) responses.

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## 1. Introduction

In recent years, NATO officials, academics, and civilian and military personnel have increasingly discussed the Alliance's "Southern Flank." In 2015, NATO and a range of partners hosted a workshop in Rome on "[Assessing the Crisis on NATO's Southern Flank](#)," and in 2016 the Carnegie Foundation launched a report which outlined a [broad-based strategy](#) for NATO's Southern Flank. The [German Federal Academy for Security Policy](#) has also engaged with this issue, beginning to move the discussion from a primary focus on military cooperation and border security and instead considering more typically civilian challenges such as migration.

Given the level of dialogue which has emerged surrounding this relatively amorphous term, this paper takes up the question of NATO's Southern Flank, questions the terminology surrounding such a region (see Box 1) and explores some of the non-military challenges facing the region: including migration and illicit trafficking and their intersection with conflict and violent extremism.

The authors show that these challenges have deep-rooted origins which, according to available research and civilian entities, cannot be addressed by focusing solely on the "Southern Flank" with traditional military resources and understandings. Addressing the underlying challenges will require a more nuanced approach across a broader geographical region – which the authors label the "Greater South" – as well as cooperation with non-NATO entities. Furthermore, the authors note that challenges emanating from the Greater South also present opportunities as well as risks for NATO member states. In doing so the authors ask: How can NATO's objectives in this strategic space be bolstered by not only countering threats, but also by capitalizing on such opportunities?

The following observations and findings are based on a review of the pertinent literature from academics, research institutions and various international and non-governmental organisations around the world. They also emerge in part from the authors' combined twenty years of experience working on and researching issues ranging from civil-military interaction to post-crisis stabilisation and humanitarian action in contexts as diverse as Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Lebanon, Somalia, Syria and Yemen for governments, international organisations (IOs), the World Bank, international nongovernmental organisations (INGOs), NATO's former Civil-Military Fusion Centre and others. The authors' intent – and that of NATO's Open Perspectives Exchange Network (OPEN) – is not to have the "final word" on any topic, but rather to reflect a range of views in order to spark a free-flowing discussion and debate within and outside of the Alliance to the benefit of all parties.

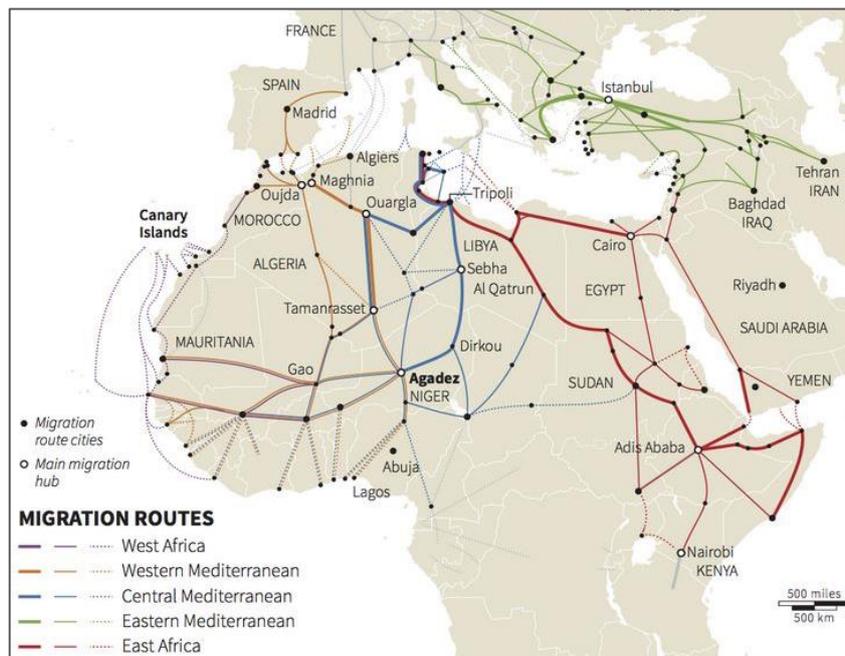
**Box 1: Syntax Matters - Southern Flank vs Greater South**

Before moving further into the paper, it is important to take up the question of terminology. The growing use of the term “Southern Flank” raises a number of potential quandaries. Firstly, this primarily military term is likely to be off-putting to many current or would-be NATO partners. These include a wide range of civilian stakeholders, from member’s states’ own development/donor agencies and foreign ministries, to entities such as the United Nations, World Bank, INGOs and others. If NATO wishes to engage with these sorts of actors – and, indeed, with governments across the Southern Flank – it may need to consider alternative terms that are less heavily militarized. Secondly, the notion of a weak or under-defended Southern Flank is likely to result in a near-exclusive focus on threats and risks. Instead, NATO may be less likely to focus on opportunities to cooperate with African and Middle Eastern countries on improving governance, promoting economic development, sharing energy and other more positive areas. Hence, this paper suggests NATO re-considers its growing adoption of the term Southern Flank and considers others, such as Greater South, which are less heavily value-laden and less military-centric.

**2. Migration and the Greater South**

Migration from the Greater South to Europe and North America remains a pressing and controversial issue, as more than [1.2 million people applied for asylum](#) in the EU in 2015, according to the European Commission. While military actors have commonly associated this challenge with instability in Libya, which has allowed smuggling networks to operate there on a large scale, the challenge of migration into NATO member countries has much deeper roots. This is apparent from an article from the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) and a report from the International Centre for Migration Policy (see Figure 1) which both show the [diversity of migration routes](#) leading to European NATO countries.

Figure 1  
Major Migration Routes



Source: International Centre for Migration Policy and Reuters, “The [many different routes](#) that migrants are taking to reach Western Europe,” 12 Sept 2015.

Such a map (Figure 1) also demonstrates the small number of [transit points](#) that migrants pass through en route to European NATO member states. These include cities like Bamako and Gao (Mali), Agadez (Niger), and Tamanrasset (Algeria) as well as Khartoum (Sudan) and Addis Ababa (Ethiopia). These choke/transit points across the Greater South provide useful entry points for NATO and other actors to engage with the migration issue before it arrives on the southern shores of the Mediterranean. That is, migration can be addressed not only along the so-called Southern Flank, but also across the Greater South in communities from which migrants originate and in the transit points where they often access or pass between smuggling networks.

It is likewise important to consider, not only the major migration and trafficking routes but also the statistics on migration (see Table 1). The figures below point to growing numbers of migrants from West Africa, including Nigeria, The Gambia, Guinea, and Ivory Coast – a set of countries which may not be part of the Southern Flank, but which are integral if one considers what this paper terms the Greater South.

Table 1

Countries of Origin for EU First-Time Asylum Seekers, Totals, and Changes for the Top 15 Countries

Country of origin	Total first-time asylum applications Q3 2015-Q3 2016)	Change between Q3 2015 and Q3 2016
1. Syria	425,880	-38%
<b>2. Afghanistan</b>	<b>226,410</b>	<b>7%</b>
3. Iraq	159,425	-20%
<b>4. Nigeria</b>	<b>39,330</b>	<b>36%</b>
5. Pakistan	49,970	-33%
<b>6. Iran</b>	<b>47,715</b>	<b>141%</b>
7. Eritrea	30,705	-14%
8. Albania	34,485	-67%
<b>9. Russia</b>	<b>24,715</b>	<b>31%</b>
10. Somalia	17,880	-2%
11. Bangladesh	15,785	-35%
<b>12. Gambia</b>	<b>14,190</b>	<b>33%</b>
<b>13. Guinea</b>	<b>10,185</b>	<b>166%</b>
<b>14. Ivory Coast</b>	<b>9,155</b>	<b>103%</b>
<b>15. Morocco</b>	<b>10,265</b>	<b>187%</b>

Source: EU Stat Database, [Asylum quarterly report, Q3 2016](#), European Commission. Note: This is the most recent report available at the time of writing. Countries from which migrant figures are increasing have been bolded for emphasis.

## 2.1. Challenges and Opportunities

Migration poses a combination of challenges and opportunities. From a security standpoint, migration flows pose three main dilemmas. First, irregular migration is perceived to pose law enforcement challenges. However, [various studies note](#), including [European Commission](#) and [Pew Research Centre](#) reports, that there is [scant](#) evidence that migrants pose [greater terror or criminal threats](#) than those born in a particular country. However, recent attacks in Paris and

Brussels show terrorist groups like the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), may increasingly be attempting to exploit refugee flows for terror plots. Furthermore, a predominately young male influx poses social stability challenges, not only in assimilation and cultural differences relating to [gender relations](#), as a 2013 Pew Research Centre survey suggests, but also in the fact that most young, male migrants, many of whom are single, will be jobless for a year or two following arrival. This may be the case in European NATO member countries today, where [66.2% of migrants in 2015](#) are young men according to the International Organization for Migration.

There are also [concerns](#) that large numbers of migrants may pose [economic challenges](#) for certain NATO member states. However, such worries are, according to available economic research from the [European Investment Bank](#) and [Pew Research Centre](#), somewhat overstated. The economic cost of migration to destination countries is minimal and generally has little effect on wages, even in unskilled industries. As a [recent Oxford/Bank of England report](#) notes, a ten-percentage-point increase in migrants working in unskilled jobs, such as construction, depresses relevant wages by only 2%. However, the authors note the size of the impact directly correlates with the size of the population influx and present labour supply.

The overall financial cost of refugees is highest in the short term, though is relatively low; the [IMF recently estimated](#) that refugees would add around 0.19% of GDP to public expenditure in the European Union by 2020. While unemployed refugees will also increase overall unemployment figures, the IMF estimates that migrants and refugees will lead annual output to increase by 0.1% in the EU on average by the end of 2017 and even greater in countries such as Germany, which host large numbers of refugees and asylum seekers. This speaks to the potential opportunities inherent in the migration flows.

Therefore, migration can, contrary to prevailing concerns, pose a [series of economic benefits](#). With approximately 84% of incoming migrants [under 34 years old](#), according to European Commission figures, most new migrants will become employed and contribute to economies. This is much needed in an ageing European continent that requires more young workers to fund pensions and benefits, however it would [stop short of reversing](#) Europe's shrinking population trend.

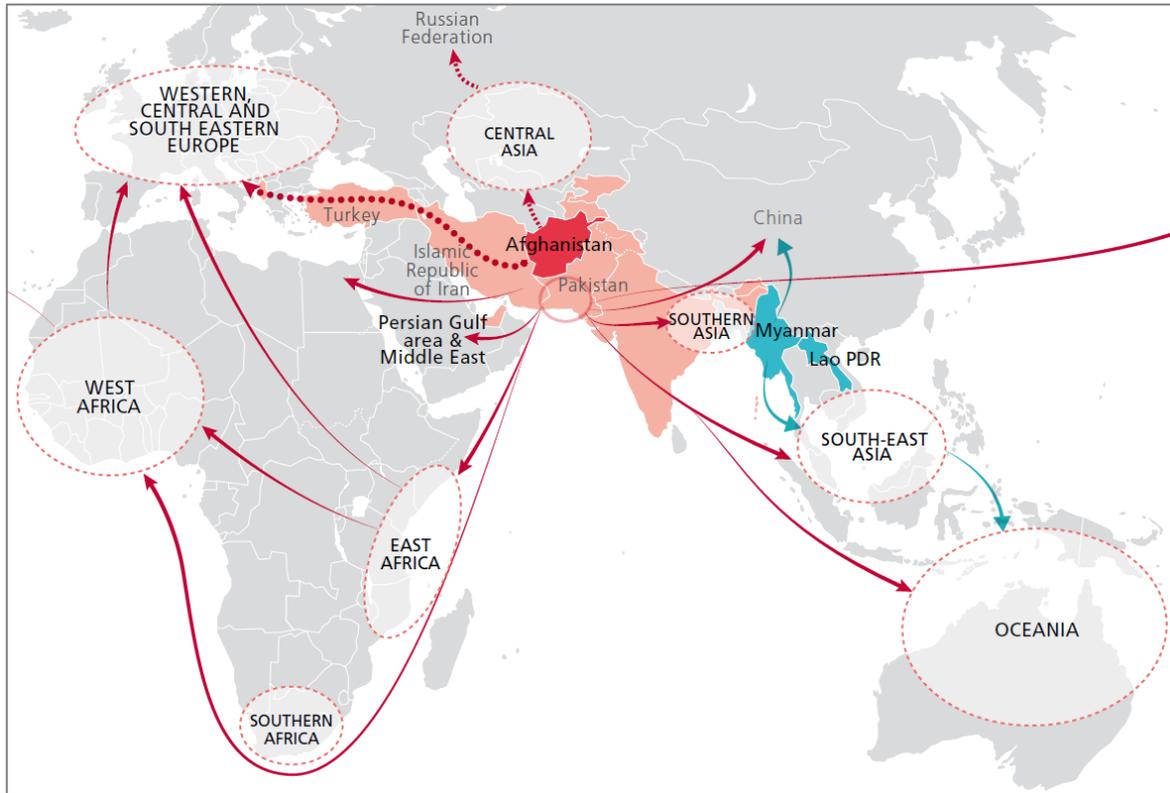
Appropriate policy and investment platforms can [turn migration into an asset](#). For instance, the removal of barriers to employment not only adds money to state coffers through taxes, but fosters assimilation and economic equality between locals and migrants, preventing the emergence of a poorer, linguistically separated migrant class.

### **3. Illicit Trafficking and the Greater South**

The need to consider Greater South – rather than fixating on a limited number of countries along the “Southern Flank” – also becomes evident in trafficking flows into European NATO member states. Drugs, guns and other illicit goods enter NATO member states through a [variety of routes](#), according to the EU and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Opiates, particularly heroin, from Afghanistan, primarily pass through Iran and move westward into NATO member countries from there. However, it is also increasingly being shipped [around the](#)

[African continent](#) and into West Africa, particularly into Guinea and Mali, where it then joins with large-scale cocaine shipment from South America and locally-synthesised methamphetamine and moves northward into Europe via land and sea routes.

Figure 2  
Map of Migrant Heroin Trafficking Routes



Source: UNODC, [World Drug Report 2016](#).

Indeed, the nexus of drug trafficking into European NATO member states – like a growing proportion of migration – increasingly revolves around West Africa, according to a [2016 Brookings Institution report](#). The Brookings report noted that ‘since the mid-2000s, [West Africa] has emerged as an important transshipment point through which international drug cartels move cocaine and heroin from South America and Asia to Europe and North America’. Brookings, along with an article in the journal *Stability*, point to West Africa’s rise as a trafficking hub given high rates of [endemic poverty as well as corruption](#) among the political and security establishments.

### 3.1. Challenges and Opportunities

Like migration, illicit trafficking points to challenges as well as opportunities. The following section first reviews the costs of trafficking to NATO states, particularly those in Europe, and notes the opportunity that illicit trafficking flows signal for Alliance members and states in the Greater South.

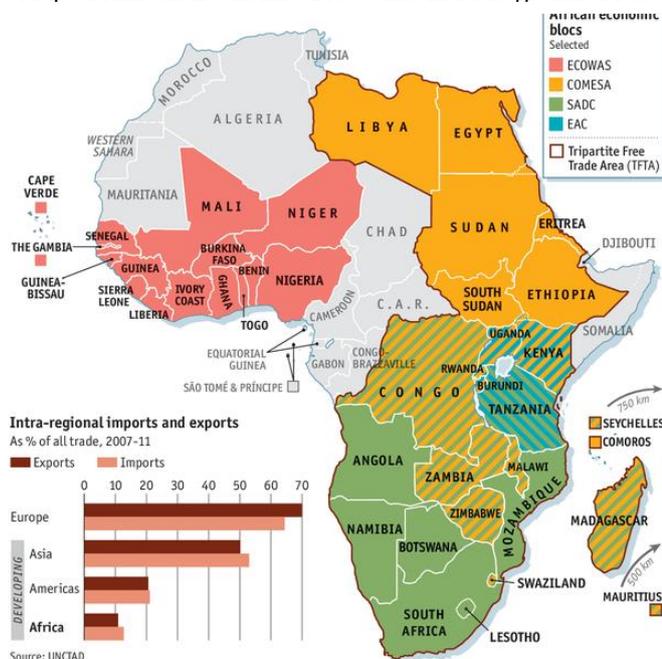
In Europe, the costs of trafficking manifest themselves in numerous ways, ranging from public health to the prices of security services as well as to lost revenue.<sup>3</sup> A [2016 European Parliament report](#) estimates trafficking, organised crime, and corruption in the European Union costs between €218bn and €282bn annually in lost economic output. Furthermore, that report describes how corruption and illicit trafficking, including drugs, contraband and slavery, are associated with more unequal societies, higher levels of organised crime, weaker rule of law and lower trust in institutions and an associated reduced voter turnout in elections. A separate [European Parliament report investigates](#) these costs more in depth, specifically noting drug trafficking's costs to security. In Belgium for example, authorities spent €975mn on drug policy in 2008, including policing and treatment. [The UK National Crime Agency](#), meanwhile, estimates drug trafficking costs Britain €12.35bn per year. [Europol notes trafficking in arms and persons](#) operates hand in glove with drug trafficking, either working complementary, especially relating to weapons, or in parallel, including sex and labour slavery.

The human cost of trafficking is even higher, especially when considering trafficking in arms and persons. Tens of thousands of people die each year in [Europe, the United States](#) and [Canada](#) as a result of accidental overdoses due to opiates. Moreover, trafficking from the Middle East - including Syria, Iran, and Iraq - through NATO's south-eastern flank plays a role in [ongoing conflict](#) in Turkey and the Levant.

Most drugs, weapons, and contraband are trafficked to Alliance states by organised or loosely associated criminal groups with connections scattered across the Greater South, as depicted above. These criminal groups operate in the space between states' laws and their ability to enforce them, generally in regions of low economic activity, low state capacity, or low-intensity conflict. Development activities encouraging licit (lawful) commerce and economic development would confront organised criminal activity in two main ways.

First, it would increase regional wages and quality of life, reducing the incentive for government and law enforcement officials to collude in trafficking. Second, as an LSE study concludes, greater economic development and social mobility

Figure 3  
Map of African Economic Blocs and Intra-Regional Trade



Source: [UNCTAD, The Economist](#)

<sup>3</sup> Organised crime in the EU as a whole, according to a European Commission-funded report, is [worth at least €110bn per year](#), approximately 1% of EU GDP.

[reduces the incentive](#) for people to engage in organised crime in the first place, assuming work in the licit economy is potentially as lucrative (at the pinnacle of one's career) and less dangerous than that in the illicit economy. International cooperation to bolster the rule of law and good governance, paired with trade deals to incentivize foreign direct investment, would accelerate development.

Trafficking routes are generally inefficient as they are unable to utilize licit transit points; if they could, producers would send cocaine direct to dealers from Colombia, rather than transiting it through West Africa to Southern Europe and elsewhere. However, in some cases they signal the need for liberalisation and the potential for licit trade. For instance, the Tripartite Free Trade Area (TFA) covers 26 African countries, creating the biggest free trade area in Africa, and joins three regional blocs: the East African Community, the Southern African Development Community, and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa. However, researchers have characterised the [TFAs as broad and shallow](#), maintaining inefficiencies and protectionism in most sectors. For this reason, as the [Economist](#) details and a [UN trade body corroborates](#), many African businesses avoid formality altogether. Informal and illicit trade that bypasses customs through porous borders provides income to over 40% of Africa's population.

Improving the TFA or its component agreements and, more importantly, the limited African manufacturing bases, may bolster intra-African trade and reduce the need to illegally traffic goods across borders. By providing licit employment, such an arrangement may also reduce the "push factors" – namely poverty and unemployment – that drive migration from several parts of Africa.

A UN trade body recommends African countries [create an integration fund](#) to pave new roads and build export capacity in poorer countries. The wide network of illicit traffickers and logisticians may transfer skills to licit roles, were they more available and profitable. While not a panacea, increasing intra-African trade will boost regional development and reduce dependency on illicit markets for cash. Without a complementary increase in institutional and law enforcement capacity, however, physical connectivity and easier cross-border movement may simply provide benefits to traffickers.

#### **4. Violent Extremism: Intersections with Migration and Trafficking**

The preceding two sections have shown two major challenges facing NATO member countries and have highlighted their origin across a broad geographical area that this paper refers to as the Greater South. This section now, building upon the perspectives of the research community and civilian agencies such as IOs and INGOs, highlights some of the security risks – in terms of conflict and violent extremism – which stem from these challenges. That is, migration is not separate from trafficking or indeed from "hard" security challenges, and illicit trafficking is not only a source of concern given the health risks it poses. Furthermore, attempting to merely stamp out issues like migration by strengthening border controls, according to the research community and civilian actors, may actually exacerbate security risks facing certain NATO member countries.

#### 4.1. Migration, Conflict, and Extremism

As a recent report from the University of California-San Diego notes, people have historically moved from poor and high-birth rate countries to rich and low-birth rate countries, [fuelling the northward migration](#) from South/Central America to the United States, and from Africa to Europe. This is consistent with the theory that disparities in population, growth and labour, and supply and demand drive migration. Noting this, it is important to consider that [birth rates will level](#) in most of the world outside of sub-Saharan Africa and parts of the Middle East by 2040, assuming World Bank projections are correct. With sub-Saharan Africa set to hold more than one-third of children under 14 years old, migration from this region – and others – will boom.

Attempting to simply contain these pressures in the Greater South – rather than tackling underlying causes of migration such as conflict and poverty – may lead to a series of adverse effects. For instance, those attempting to migrate to the US or Europe would – in a context of more heavily secured borders – likely make use of more capable [smugglers and human trafficking rings](#). As human smuggling and illicit trafficking networks often overlap, this will benefit organised crime and trafficking networks which have [well-established ties](#) to extremist groups in parts of North Africa and the Sahel.

Simultaneously, a reduced migration from the Greater South towards Europe would increase south-south migration. Migrants, including some with ties to extremist groups or ideologies, would be more likely to move toward wealthier countries in the Middle East, to parts of Eurasia and to better-off cities in middle-income countries such as Kenya, South Africa, and Nigeria. In doing so, they would fuel economic and cultural tensions in these countries and potentially lead to new security risks.

According to a joint report from the University of Canberra and the Australian National University, in coordination with the OECD, political instability in economically and politically developing regions, especially among those with diverse populations, can lead to [increased state militarization](#). Furthermore, [as the European Council on Foreign Relations shows](#), migration in previously unstable regions can reignite sectarian and geopolitical disputes, as in the Balkans or in the case of the Syrian refugee crisis. That is, responses to migration challenges across the Greater South can have unintended consequences that can pose future challenges for NATO member countries' security and for security in the broader region. By preventing south-to-north migration, strategic spaces surrounding NATO may face increased social and political instability as well as the growth of violent extremism.

Aggressive responses to migration among NATO member countries may further embolden countries in the Greater South to respond to migrants in their midst in a similar manner. [Researchers and aid groups](#) have already highlighted the manner in which certain countries' efforts to remove migrants, refugees and asylum seekers may contribute to Kenya's increasing push to [forcibly repatriate Somali refugees](#) residing there. Doing so could pose [major challenges for Somalia](#), which would be overwhelmed by returnees and which would face a major loss of remittances from Kenya. Furthermore, aggressive security responses, especially toward migrants, can provide an [opening for extremism](#) to take root. If other countries across the Greater

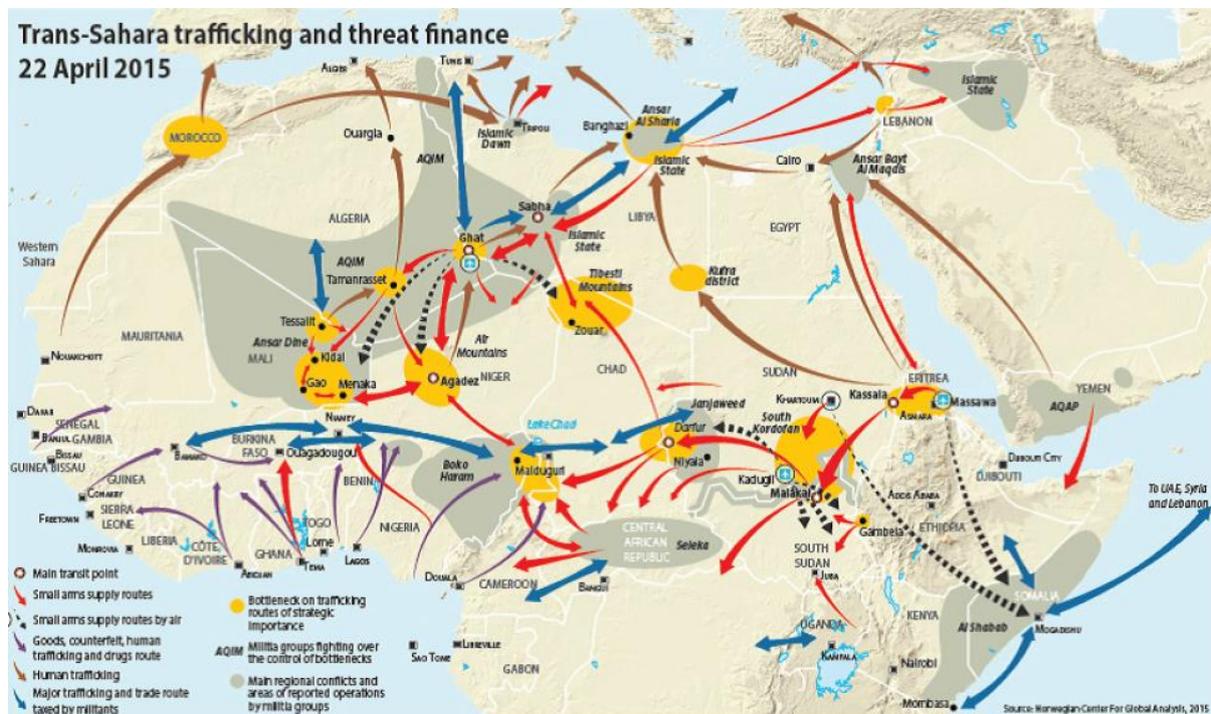
South respond in kind, it could have devastating economic and political effects for particular countries.

Consider for instance that Cote d'Ivoire is the source of 90% of remittances to Burkina Faso, and that countries like The Gambia and Liberia are also heavily reliant on remittances from their own migrant populations. If countries across the Greater South are emboldened to take a harder approach to migration, this could lead to a regional economic decline, political instability, the growth of illicit trafficking networks and further numbers of migrants heading toward countries in Europe and southern Africa. Such a situation – the geographical displacement of challenges from one region to another – is something that NATO has witnessed previously in Afghanistan where successes in tackling narcotics in one province often led to the spread of poppy cultivation and associated armed groups in neighbouring provinces.

#### 4.2. Illicit Trafficking, Conflict and Extremism

Just as migration and migration control measures may pose challenges related to extremism, so may the growth of illicit trafficking networks across the Greater South. It is well established that terrorist organizations use [illicit networks](#) and [markets to finance operations](#). The FARC, the Taliban and the Haqqini network rely on drug trafficking, timber smuggling and kidnapping, for instance. ISIL, al-Qaeda's affiliates, and militia groups in Mali and Libya similarly benefit from migrant and antiquities smuggling, mostly through taxing smugglers.

Figure 4  
Map of Trans-Sahara Trafficking Routes



Source: [The Global Initiative against Transnational Organised Crime](#)

A [joint Europol and Interpol investigation underlines](#) the extent of trafficking networks and their overlap with terrorist organizations, noting migrant smuggling was worth an estimated \$5-6 billion dollars in 2015 and organised criminal enterprises facilitated travel for 90% of migrants bound for the EU. Elaborating on this, the [Geneva Centre for Security Policy states](#) migrant smuggling “has particularly strengthened groups with a terrorist agenda, including the Islamic State,” and that taxation on migration and illicit trafficking is ‘possibly now the largest and most easily accessible finance opportunity for both organised crime networks and armed groups’. The smugglers often overlap criminal “industries” and traffic drugs, weapons, and other goods alongside people, often forcing migrants into forced labour or sex-slavery as well, providing more taxable activity for extremist groups.

Trafficking and organised crime exists in the gaps in a state’s capacity, and is often facilitated by corruption within the public sector. Indeed, research from [Brown University](#), [American University](#), and [King’s College London](#), among [others](#), note organised crime has penetrated all levels of some states, a claim endorsed by US State and Treasury Department sanctions alleging certain state lawmakers and security and state officials are “[drug kingpins](#)”. As the following paragraphs show, while providing needed money to economies in the short-term, trafficking and corruption erode state institutions and breed instability.

The [IMF reported in 2016](#) that the cost of bribes throughout the world amounts to \$1.5 – \$2trillion each year in economic output (2% of global GDP), and cost countries more in stunted economic growth, lost tax revenues and sustained poverty. In the research paper, the IMF states that corruption can cost countries thousands of dollars per person per year in lost economic output. Most damage would be concentrated in public institutions, which through lack of taxes, become more inefficient, and deliver fewer public services, such as education, public health infrastructure, and security. Furthermore, states with high corruption attract less foreign investment. All of this leads to lower levels of development, larger informal and illicit economies, and an increased risk of and decreased ability to respond, to instability.

As a 2016 Brookings report notes, political weakness, and corruption in certain West African countries enabled Colombian drug traffickers to [take control of parts](#) of those countries. In certain states drug traffickers exploited widespread poverty and corruption to co-opt government, military and law enforcement officials to underpin the drug trade. Severe political turmoil in the region in 2012, including a coup and insurgency in Mali, brought to light drug trafficking’s role in fostering instability.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), trafficking in natural resources in the absence of state capacity fuelled decades of war; militia groups would finance themselves by smuggling minerals and other natural resources until a series of international agreements, as a part of broader military and diplomatic responses to the conflict, dried up the market for so-called conflict minerals, including tungsten, columbite-tantalite (coltan) and tin in electronics supply chains.

The role minerals play in conflicts speaks to their value and potential for regional economic growth in stable conditions. A [tin mine in North Kivu](#), eastern DRC, is an example. A previously lawless region, the area hosts a [Canadian mine](#) that extracts some of the world’s richest tin deposits. Through agreements with the Congolese authorities and local citizens, the mine paves

roads in the region – including to Goma, the nearest border town approximately 60 kilometres south, previously a two-day journey – funds local projects including new schools, and pays taxes and road tolls. This gives the central government a financial incentive to provide security in the area, the main threat to growth; three rebel groups remain active in the region. Similar economic deals, paired with increased economic diversification to avoid over-reliance on fossil fuels and commodities, such as in [renewable power](#), would increase development, good governance, and foreign investment while reducing citizens’ incentive to migrate and participate in illicit trafficking.

## 5. Conclusion: Implications for NATO

As this paper has thus far shown: (1) the source of several major challenges facing NATO are less of a “flank” and more of a network of countries spanning much of Africa, the Middle East and beyond; (2) these challenges are intersecting, and typical approaches to addressing them (e.g., increased border control) can displace the challenge and plant the seeds of future instability elsewhere in NATO’s wider neighbourhood; and (3) the various challenges facing NATO may be reconceptualised – to some extent – as opportunities rather than purely as threats. The authors now take these findings and address relevant implications for NATO. However, it is important to acknowledge that this brief discussion is intended to serve as a jumping off point for discussion rather than as a final word on the matter. Furthermore, the following four major implications reflect the author’s own analysis based on the information reviewed in preparing this report; the views included here are solely those of the authors.

Firstly, as discussed in the introduction to this report, NATO may wish to re-think its growing use of the term Southern Flank and instead develop a term that is more reflective of the complex and not-purely-military nature of challenges facing the Alliance from regions to the South. While this paper has suggested the term Greater South, which is only one of several options for a name which is less militaristic and which is less likely to raise tensions with non-NATO entities.

Secondly, NATO must be cognizant of the displacement effects of its responses – and the responses of member states – to complex geographical challenges that span the Greater South. From this perspective NATO must consider how approaches to migration will affect other locations within NATO’s area of concern by pushing migrants towards areas which are particularly sensitive or which are under-prepared to deal with them. By displacing challenges, could NATO member countries be planting the seeds of future conflict or be indirectly contributing to the spread of violent extremism? These sorts of possibilities must be high on NATO’s radar and take a medium-term perspective rather than one solely fixated on the here and now.

Thirdly, it is apparent that the challenges noted in this paper will require non-NATO and non-military engagement, including by international organisations, INGOs, and national authorities across the Greater South. This includes improving education and health institutions, among others, to improve employment capacity and quality of life. Heavy-capital investment in infrastructure may facilitate economic development and provide jobs, with investment in human capital both necessary and complementary to this. Paired with economic reform and innovation,

this may reduce a state's import dependency and spur growth, potentially reducing migration incentives.

Lastly, it is imperative for NATO to focus its analytical capabilities on the Greater South and on emerging threats and challenges. Otherwise, the Alliance risks being caught off-guard, as happened when instability erupted across parts of the Arab world and Sahel over the past decade. As this section has demonstrated, one of the greatest emerging sources of concern is West Africa given that this region is gradually becoming a major source of Europe-bound migrants, illicit goods and, closely related, extremism. To address this sort of challenge and prevent strategic surprise, NATO will need to continue to develop less situation-specific analytical capabilities and introduce a capability which monitors seemingly stable or lower-priority regions to determine where the seeds of future violence and extremism could be germinating in humanitarian, socio-economic, and governance-oriented realms.

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