

Review – Routledge Handbook of Transnational Organized Crime

By Robert Bunker

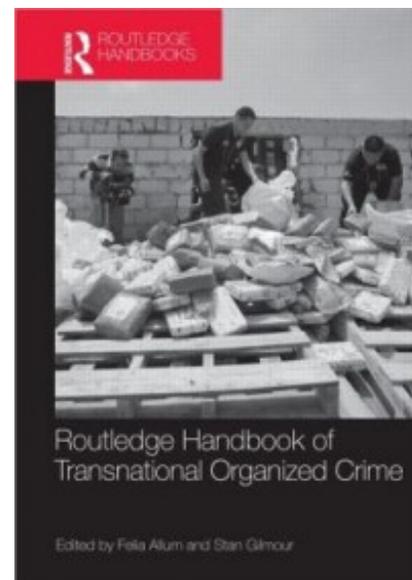
[Routledge Handbook of Transnational Organized Crime](#)

By: Felia Allum and Stan Gilmour, eds.

London: Routledge, 2012

The *Routledge Handbook of Transnational Organized Crime* was finished in the Spring of 2011 and provides a comprehensive and detailed 576 page overview of the topic of transnational organized crime (TOC). It is part of the acclaimed Routledge International Handbook series. The work is edited by Felia Allum, University of Bath, and Stan Gilmour, Thames Valley Police. This partnership very much helps to create a more useful and hybrid product melding academia (theory) with policing (practice). It contains the contributions of about four-dozen authors, ranging from senior and established scholars through to younger academics, legal practitioners, and policing and intelligence services personnel. The authors are, however, mostly from academia—with criminology, law, sociology/anthropology, and politics dominant. Geographically, the authors are primarily representative of the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia, although a number of scholars from the Netherlands and Canada are also contributors.

The handbook is complimentary to some of the more general and country specific encyclopedias of organized crime—filling the niche between them and those works focusing on specific individual or genres of transnational actors. It is a contemporary publication to Philip L. Reichel and Jay S. Albaneses' (eds) *Handbook of Transnational Crime & Justice* (Sage, 2013), and Mitchel P. Roth's, smaller and single authored, *Global Organized Crime: A Reference Handbook* (ABC-CLIO, 2010). The work, containing thirty-six chapters, is divided into six parts; (I) Theories, concepts, definitions and laws, (II) Origins and manifestations, (III) Contagion and evolution, (IV) Intensity and impact, (V) Governance, and (VI) Reaction and future. An individual chapter and author listing can be accessed via the [publisher website](#). The handbook also includes the prerequisite front pieces—such as a list of illustrations, foreword, acknowledgements, contributor biographies, and introduction—and an index in the back of the work.



Given that so many chapters exist in the work to potentially critique, only some of the content highlights—personal favorites derived from my own proclivities—will be mentioned. To begin with, the reviewer found the spider diagram of handbook themes (p. 12) to be extremely useful as a conceptual tool along with the entire short Introduction (pp.1-15) to the work with its various tables and maps of illicit flows and academic and practitioner discourses. Chapter 6 (pp. 97-110) authored by Michael Woodiwiss, University of the West of England, on transnational organized crime in America (past and present) caught my attention. The conventional wisdom about TOC and the drugs trade, derived from the late 1980s and dominated by American thinking about monolithic and highly centralized criminal organizations and what the proper response should be, is challenged by the author. Essay coverage begins with the prohibition era in the US, before exploring the Italian mafia, drug prohibition policies in the Caribbean and Mexico, and then straying into more recent Mexican street gang experiences. The author's conclusion, which has quite a bit of merit, is that the American view of TOC is oversimplified and, as a result, the response to it has been ineffective. This essay was written prior to Peter Andreas' new book *Smuggler Nation: How the Illicit Trade Made America* (Oxford, 2013)—it would be most interesting to see if that work would have any bearing on Woodiwiss's perceptions one way or another.

Chapter 13 on the drugs trade in Colombia from 1930 to 2000 (pp. 201-216) by Michael Kenney, University of Pittsburgh, was also quite interesting. The essay outlined five phases of the drugs trade. Many of us are familiar with the fourth phase from the mid-1980s to the 1990s, which saw the rise and fall of the Medellin and Cali cartels. The initial three phases, initially derived from contraband smuggling, provide historical context and the fifth phase, the reality of today, focuses on the current decentralization of the trade. Table 13.4 nicely sums up the evolution of the illicit drug trade in Colombia. Chapter 15 by Tamara Makarenko, a private intelligence contractor, on the crime-terror nexus (pp. 234-249) was of great interest along with allied Chapter 27 by Angela Gendron, Canadian intelligence and security studies, on crime-terror networks and those pursuing them (pp. 403-417). The use of the tables and figure in the Makarenko work is very instructive and portrays the duality of the issue with a back and forth comparison between criminal(s) and terrorist(s) and the blending taking place. The Gendron essay, in turn, further elaborated the trend towards a middle of the continuum blurring between criminals and terrorists based on more of a Canadian and United Kingdom perspective.

Chapter 26 on small arms trafficking, TOC, and states (pp. 391-402) by Dawn L. Rothe and Jeffrey Ian Ross, with a research consortium and University of Baltimore respectively, provides an excellent overview to the dynamics involved. The implicit and explicit involvement of states in arms trafficking—an illicit and gray area activity—in which numerous parties profit, including multinational corporations, is an understudied phenomena. The trafficking process is reminiscent of a 'smuggler chain,' though in this instance the nodes are represented by a network of arms manufacturers, purchasers/holders, stockpiles, intermediary brokers, diversion cut-outs, and final product destinations. The short essay relies upon quite a number of documents and court records to make its case.

The strengths of the work are its far ranging coverage of transnational organized crime; the scholarship and professionalism of its many contributors; its well articulated structure; and its very good editing, especially the chapter link-backs to guide the reader between the many contributions. The vast majority of the essays are very well researched with ample bibliographies and well-defined chapter subsections and are easy to read. The polished end product is clearly the result of a multi-year effort from conception to completion. The weaknesses of the work are for the most part limited. Out of necessity, it represents a collection of long essays produced by many authors guided by the editors' vision and intent. The global overview provided on transnational organized crime, however, does not represent a global perspective. Given the concentration of Anglo-English authors, the work very much represents a Western perspective on TOC. One additional minor weakness of the work is that it would have benefitted from some sort of concluding and integrative essay about transnational organized crime futures—the final section is more country specific in orientation and derived from United Kingdom, Italian, European Union, Russian, United States, and Australian views. A master reference listing placed at the end of the handbook would also be extremely useful aggregating the chapter bibliographies, but already given the overall size of the tome such an omission is understood.

One issue with the work, however, is the price. At \$225.00 retail, the handbook is affordable only for some academic and policy institute libraries and more specialized research centers. The Kindle edition at \$180.00 is not much better in pricing—though the handbook can be rented for about \$50.00 for limited student and researcher use. Due to the great cost of this work, its availability for most *e-IR* readers will be extremely limited and, as a result, it will be utilized primarily by a small body of scholars and professionals in the larger and better funded universities and research and policy centers. This is unfortunate because the majority of the chapters are insightful and first rate.

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