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**PRESS RELEASE**

## **NEW REPORT EXPOSES IRAN'S USE OF ORGANIZED CRIME AS A TOOL OF STATECRAFT**

*A report launched today by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Against Organized Crime (GI-TOC) titled **Iran's Criminal State-Craft** by J.R. Mailey exposes how Tehran works with criminal actors to promote its strategic objectives at home and abroad.*

As tensions rise in the Middle East, the focus is on geopolitics and the risks of escalating war in the region. But underneath the surface, some of the instability in the region is fomented by criminal actors colluding with Iran's regime.

This new report from the GI-TOC outlines how, over the past decade, Iran's regime has been working with criminal actors across the world to assassinate critics and adversaries, procure materials to advance its nuclear program, fund armed groups and terrorist organizations, circumvent international sanctions, launder money and sell its oil.

The report includes case studies of how the regime works with criminal actors and middlemen as well as militias in Iraq, Syria, Palestine, and Lebanon. For example, Hezbollah has played an important role in the smuggling of oil, weapons, and a range of sanctioned goods as well as laundering money to the benefit of Iranian authorities.

According to the report, Iran's weaponization of illicit markets advances five strategic objectives: preventing and containing opposition and dissent; weakening adversaries while avoiding a direct military confrontation; strengthening allies in the region while retaining influence over them; regaining access to money and markets; and improving power projection and asymmetric warfare capabilities.

"Tapping into networks of profit-driven criminal organizations gives Iran's rulers an option to conduct precision strikes against foreign targets with limited overhead costs", says the report. "Although Iran's violent attacks on foreign soil have become remarkably brazen, its reliance upon criminal proxies has often provided a fig leaf for the puppeteers in Tehran."

The report also reveals Iran's involvement in profit-driven criminal enterprises at home and abroad. This includes heroin trafficking (particularly through Turkey and the South Caucasus), trafficking of captagon (particularly from Syria) and methamphetamine, weapons smuggling, money laundering, and human trafficking. The revenue generated by these illicit activities helps to fund Iran's proxies and enrich state-embedded actors, particularly the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

To reduce Iran's ability to exploit organized crime as a tool of statecraft, the report makes a number of recommendations, including:

- Identify and expose links between Iranian government officials and criminal enterprises as well as the intermediaries, particularly in states that Iran tends to use as a gateway to the global economy (such as Turkey, UAE, and Cyprus) as well as the so-called 'axis of resistance' countries (especially China, Russia and Venezuela), which have been linked to sanctions-busting for Iran.
  - Look closer at the financial and logistical networks that underpin Hezbollah's role in illicit economies.
  - Engage the private sector to reduce their vulnerability to (or complicity in) money laundering, sanctions violations, fraud, or other financial crimes linked to Iran or its proxies
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**For media inquiries, interviews, or further information:**

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