The Wild Wild East: Nuclear Trafficking and the ‘Lawless Lands’ of Eastern Europe and the Russian Caucasus

Ross Hagan
Mercyhurst University
Tom Ridge School of Intelligence Studies and Information Science
Agenda

• Trafficking Data
• Evaluating the ‘Lawless Lands’
  • Transnistria
  • South Ossetia
• Projecting future nexus between trafficking and terrorism
Figure 2. Trafficking and other loss-of-control incidents recorded in the Database on Nuclear Smuggling, Theft, and Orphan Radiation Sources (DSTO), 1991–2012
Incidents involving unauthorized possession of HEU and plutonium-239, 1992-2013
‘Lawless Lands’ and Trafficking

• ‘Lawless Lands’ refers to regions within states that the government lacks proper control and influence over

• Areas characterized by weak economies fuelled through trafficking
Transnistria

• Separatist region in Moldova, formed as a de facto state following a short war with Moldova in 1992

• Moldovan police/authorities have no jurisdiction in Transnistria
Trafficking in Transnistria

- EU concerned trafficking in Transnistria could spillover.
- Shadow economy brings in roughly $2 billion through smuggling.
- 2014: Suppliers in Moldova sought Islamic extremists to sell enough cesium-137 to make a dirty bomb.
South Ossetia

• Separatist region within Georgia, borders Russia
• Smuggler in 2006 originally tried selling HEU in South Ossetia
• Majority of smugglers are opportunistic
Georgia borders with radiological detectors

- Seven borders with radiological detectors
  - Sadakhlo border with Azerbaijan stopped 2003 incident
  - Kazbegi border with Russia did not stop 2006 incident
Projecting the Nexus with Terrorism

- “I really want an Islamic buyer because they will bomb the Americans”
- Paris attack
- ISIS recently announced intentions to obtain/build chemical weapons
Conclusions

• It is likely that existing smuggling routes through these regions will be used by suppliers of nuclear materials

• Current efforts to reduce trafficking in both regions are insufficient

• Potential for supplying terrorist organizations becomes an increasing concern