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COUNTERING TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME (CTOC)

CORRUPTION

Mistrust of NGO expertise hampers the fight against corruption enabling wildlife and timber crime
Justin Gosling – Environmental Investigation Agency: 18 December 2023
Corruption not only facilitates environmental crime but is also a major impediment to law enforcement and criminal justice.

Mongolia strengthens independent policy despite debt and corruption
Mendee Jargalsaikhan and Enkhbayar Namjildorj – East Asia Forum: 28 December 2023
Mongolia is successfully navigating the dynamics of electoral democracy and the challenges that face small, resource-based economies. But current political and economic trends, if not managed cautiously, could trigger more challenges ahead of its parliamentary election this year.

For more on this theme:
Treasury Targets Transnational Corruption

What's new in ICC’s 2023 Rules on Combating Corruption?

EUR 5.5 million frozen in anti-corruption investigations across Europe

Honduras Needs an International Mechanism to Address Corruption
https://www.wola.org/analysis/honduras-needs-an-international-mechanism-to-address-corruption/

EU failed to tackle corruption in Parliament, MEPs say

Combating corruption to address the triple planetary crisis
https://www.undp.org/blog/combating-corruption-address-triple-planetary-crisis

Government to crack down on corruption in the property sector

OSCE strengthens young people’s resilience to organized crime and corruption in South-Eastern Europe
https://www.osce.org/secretariat/560647
DRUG TRAFFICKING

Investigation Lays Out Deep Involvement of Maduro Regime in Drug Trade
Julieta Pelcastre – Diálogo: 20 December 2023

The latest investigative reporting highlights the deep involvement of the Venezuelan regime and its military in the drug trade.

Russians’ use of synthetic drugs is skyrocketing as soldiers return from Ukraine with addictions and trafficking supply routes dwindle
Erin Snodgrass – Business Insider: 19 December 2023

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has radically altered its criminal underworld, a report has found. Drug traffickers have been forced to find new routes into and out of the country and the war has also led to a spike in synthetic amphetamines and opioids.
https://www.businessinsider.com/russia-war-ukraine-led-spike-synthetic-opioids-country-smuggling-narcotics-2023-12

For more on this theme:
Jordan says it foiled plot by Iran-linked drug smugglers

Sri Lanka Detains Nearly 15,000 in Drug Crackdown

Under US pressure over fentanyl, Mexico wages “imaginary war on drugs”
https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/under-us-pressure-over-fentanyl-mexico-wages-imaginary-war-drugs-with-raids-2023-12-21/

Why we should be wary of China’s pledges of a fentanyl ‘crackdown’

Battling the Cartels Requires a Refocus
https://www.heritage.org/homeland-security/commentary/battling-the-cartels-requires-refocus

Will Europe Escape America’s Opioid Death Crisis?

How Narco-Rebel’s Return Could Impact Haiti’s Criminal Dynamics

How protected is Ireland’s coastline from threat of drug smuggling?

Amazon: Brazilian Criminal Groups and FARC Dissidents Join Forces for Cocaine Trafficking
TRAFFICKING IN SCARCE OR PROTECTED RESOURCES

Like his father, Hun Manet vows to end illegal logging
Radio Free Asia: 21 December 2023
Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet called on officials in his new government to end the trade, which remains a problem despite similar pledges from his father, longtime strongman Hun Sen.


Indigenous activists are risking their lives for butterflies
Anjan Sundaram – Vox: 20 December 2023
In Central Mexico’s forests, armed community members defend an iconic butterfly from cartel-backed logging.


For more on this theme:
How the Cape Town Agreement Can Improve Fisher Safety

Genomic analyses reveal poaching hotspots and illegal trade in pangolins from Africa to Asia
https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.adi5066

Where do illegal lion parts come from? A new tool offers answers

How is CITES sharpening its teeth for better compliance to stop illegal wild species trade?
https://www.traffic.org/news/sc77-cites-compliance/

Kosovo’s illegal firewood problem

Safety of Peru’s land defenders in question after killing of Indigenous leader in the Amazon

Colombian Amazon park rangers face violence, threats by illegal armed groups

Supermarket essentials will no longer be linked to illegal deforestation
INTERNET GOVERNANCE

UN’s IGF Launches DAO Pilot for Public Sector Governance
Iyiola Adrian – The Crypto Times: 22 December 2023

The United Nations Internet Governance Forum has announced the launch of a pilot project that involves creating a Distributed Autonomous Organization (DAO). It aims to explore DAO potential in public sector decision-making.


For more on this theme:

(Global) Can Disruptive Technology Be Responsible In 2024 And Beyond?

(U.S.) Why states and localities are acting on AI
https://www.brookings.edu/articles/why-states-and-localities-are-acting-on-ai/

INTERNET FREEDOM

Turkey tightens internet censorship, bans access to 16 VPN providers
Turkish Minute: 18 December 2023

The country’s Information and Communications Technologies Authority has banned access to providers that are frequently used to circumvent government censorship, Deutsche Welle’s Turkish edition reported.

https://www.turkishminute.com/2023/12/18/turkey-tightened-internet-censorship-ban-access-to-16-vpn-providers/

For more on this theme:

(Nigeria) CSOs Move Against Digital Rights Violations In Nigeria

(China) China’s Internet Censors Announce Crackdown On AI Videos And ‘Pessimism’

(Pakistan) Pakistan Restricts Internet Access Amid Rare Opposition Online Rally

(China) How 2023 marked the death of anonymity online in China
https://www.technologyreview.com/2023/12/22/1085820/death-of-anonymity-online-china/

(Latin America) Digging into the reality of internet shutdowns in Latin America: An insidious threat
CYBER STRATEGY AND RISKS

Roundup: Federal action that shaped cybersecurity in 2023
Mark Stone – Security Intelligence: 28 December 2023
It’s time to look at the top five stories that significantly shaped the landscape of United States cybersecurity at the federal level.
https://securityintelligence.com/articles/2023-federal-cybersecurity-action-roundup/

For more on this theme:
(Australia) Australia’s roadmap to global cyber leadership

(Global) India-Taiwan-US Unite To Counter China’s Cyber Threats

(Australia) Australia has a new Cyber Security Strategy: What businesses need to know

CYBER CAPACITY BUILDING

Supporting Afghanistan’s Internet Development and Digital Trust and Safety Despite the Taliban
Farzaneh Badiei – Tech Policy: 18 December 2023
The Taliban in 2021 restricted women’s access to education, health care information and other fundamental human rights. By ensuring internet availability in this crisis-affected country, it supports those who seek to preserve and exercise their human rights.

For more on this theme:
(Africa) Moments That Defined Africa’s Tech Landscape In 2023
https://cioafrica.co/pivotal-moments-that-defined-africas-tech-landscape-in-2023/

(Guatemala) Shaping a rights-based approach in Guatemala’s digital transformation

(Ukraine) Ukraine’s partners launch Tallinn Mechanism to amplify cyber support
https://therecord.media/tallinn-mechanism-ukraine-partners-cybersecurity
CYBERCRIME

Cyber sleuths reveal how they infiltrate the biggest ransomware gangs
Connor Jones – The Register: 22 December 2023

How do you break into the bad guys’ ranks? Master the lingo and research, research, research.
https://www.theregister.com/2023/12/22/how_to_infiltrate_ransomware_gangs/

For more on this theme:

(Global) Microsoft’s Digital Crime Unit Goes Deep on How It Disrupts Cybercrime

(Global) Is Cybercrime Only Going to Get Worse?
https://www.tripwire.com/state-of-security/cybercrime-only-going-get-worse

(Global) China, pockets of Cambodia and Myanmar are epicentre of cybercrime: I4C chief

(North Korea) Blockchain the key to combating N Korean cybercrime
https://asiatimes.com/2023/12/blockchain-the-key-to-combating-n-korean-cybercrime/

PROTECTION OF CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Ukraine telecom cyberattack one of ‘highest-impact’ hacks of the war
Daryna Antoniuk – The Record: 18 December 2023

The hack of telecommunications operator Kyivstar was one of the most “disruptive cyberattacks on Ukrainian networks” since Russia invaded the country in 2022, British defense intelligence said.
https://therecord.media/ukraine-kyivstar-hack-high-impact

For more on this theme:

(Russia, Ukraine) Ukrainian Hackers Strike Back: Blackjack Cyberattack Disrupts Russian Water Utility
https://thecyberexpress.com/russian-water-utility-cyberattack/

(UK) UK at high risk of catastrophic cyberattack

(U.S., Global) Critical Infrastructure Remains the Brass Ring for Cyber Attackers in 2024
**PROGRAM ON TERRORISM AND SECURITY STUDIES (PTSS)**

**TERRORISM AROUND THE WORLD**

**Terror And Treasure: What Happens When Illegal Miners Have To Collaborate With Terrorists?**
*Abdullahi Abubakar – HumAngle: 30 December 2023*

In many remote communities, Nigerians’ lives hang in the balance amid the menacing grip of terrorists and bans on mining. Their narratives unfold a chilling tale.


*For more on this theme:*

**Education Wars: The Destabilizing Effect of Violent Extremist Attacks on Schools in Africa**

**Afghans Find A Credible Opposition Voice To The Taliban – Analysis**

**What Drives an Individual to Join a Terrorist Group?**

**Somali President Mohamud aims to eradicate Al-Shabaab within a year**

**Assessing Al-Shabaab’s Threat to the Region as Somalia Joins the East Africa Community**

**How the Taliban Enables Violence Against Women**

**Counter-Terrorism and U.S. Foreign Policy Priorities**

**Aiding Terror: How Terrorists Exploit Humanitarian Organizations**

**Is ISIS Really a Defeated Terrorist Organization?**
https://www.hstoday.us/featured/is-isis-really-a-defeated-terrorist-organization/

**What happened to IS in 2023?**
Hamas is now recruiting in Lebanon. What will that mean for Hezbollah?
Justin Salhani – Al Jazeera: 18 December 2023
Mainstream Lebanese politicians have criticized the Hamas move. But it will likely help Hezbollah as tensions with Israel escalate.
https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/12/18/hamas-is-now-recruiting-in-lebanon-what-will-that-mean-for-hezbollah

For more on this theme:
An apparent Israeli strike killed a top Hamas commander. How might it impact the Gaza conflict?
https://apnews.com/article/israel-hamas-saleh-arouri-assassination-war-2ffee158445dc8dcafd9bd-c4e1164a0

Why Iran is the Key to Peace in the Middle East
https://quillette.com/2024/01/04/why-iran-is-the-key-to-peace-in-the-middle-east/

The Path to October 7: How Iran Built Up and Managed a Palestinian ‘Axis of Resistance’
https://ctc.westpoint.edu/the-path-to-october-7-how-iran-built-up-and-managed-a-palestinian-axis-of-resistance/

Could Hamas Become a Global Threat?
https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/12/19/hamas-terrorism-threat-global-europe-germany-arrests/

Exclusive: Hamas, Islamic Jihad Accused of Using Child Soldiers in War Against Israel

In a Speech, Hezbollah’s Hassan Nasrallah Has Addressed the Killing of Hamas’s Saleh al-Arouri
https://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/91335

Al Qaeda-aligned Jaysh al-Ummah says it is fighting Israeli troops in Gaza

Hezbollah’s Online Battleground: Military Media Unit’s Narratives on Telegram
https://gnet-research.org/2023/12/18/hezbollahs-online-battleground-military-media-units-narratives-on-telegram/

South Africa Institutes ICJ Proceedings Against Israel for Genocide Convention Violations

What’s east Africa’s position on the Israel-Hamas war?
Israel charts unmapped ways to treat trauma of freed child hostages
https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israel-charts-unmapped-ways-treat-trauma-freed-child-hostages-2023-12-20/

Iran and Hezbollah were behind cyberattack on Israeli hospital, says National Cyber Directorate
https://www.calcalistech.com/ctechnews/article/h1owft6it

Jordan-Syria drug smuggling escalation linked to Hezbollah and Gaza instability
https://www.thenationalnews.com/mena/jordan/2023/12/20/jordan-syria-drug-war-captagon-gaza/

Violence in Iran and Lebanon Prompts Concern Israel-Hamas War Could Expand
https://www.npr.org/2024/01/03/1198909893/consider-this-from-npr-draft-01-03-2024

The Hamas attack left many Israeli farms abandoned — some worry forever
https://www.npr.org/2023/12/24/1221124833/israel-gaza-kibbutz-hamas-palestinians-farms

Israel-Hamas 2023 Symposium – Sexual Violence on October 7
https://lieber.westpoint.edu/sexual-violence-october-7/

Israel-Hamas 2023 Symposium – The Legal Protection of Hospitals during Armed Conflict
https://lieber.westpoint.edu/legal-protection-hospitals-during-armed-conflict/

Israel-Hamas 2023 Symposium – Hostage Rescue Operations and the Law of Armed Conflict
https://lieber.westpoint.edu/hostage-rescue-operations-law-armed-conflict/

The online information war over fake content linked to Israel-Hamas conflict
https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/the-online-information-war-over-fake-content-linked-to-israel-hamas-conflict

Here’s how Hezbollah will likely respond to Israel’s assassination of Saleh Al-Arouri

Distortion by design: How social media platforms shaped our initial understanding of the Israel-Hamas conflict

American Victims of Hamas Attack on Israel Plan to Sue North Korea

IDF’s Subterranean Challenge: Profiling Gaza Metro, Hamas’s Centre Of Gravity

Terrorist Financing: Hamas And Cryptocurrency Fundraising – Analysis
RUSSIA/UKRAINE

To defeat Putin in a long war, Ukraine must switch to active defense in 2024
Mykola Bielieskov – Atlantic Council: 4 January 2024

As Russia’s full-scale invasion approaches the two-year mark, it is vital for the military and political leadership in Kyiv to properly digest the lessons of 2022 and 2023.


For more on this theme:

The Numbers Suggest Ukraine Can Sustain the Fight
https://www.thecipherbrief.com/column/opinion/the-numbers-suggest-ukraine-can-sustain-the-fight

Ukraine at War: The Year Past and the Year Ahead (Part One)

Ukraine at War: The Year Past and the Year Ahead (Part Two)

Russia expands into the Sahel with its new brand: Africa Corps

Ukraine Symposium – Retaliatory Warfare and International Humanitarian Law
https://lieber.westpoint.edu/retaliatory-warfare-international-humanitarian-law/

How Ukrainian special forces secured a critical Dnipro River crossing in southern Ukraine
https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-war-occupation-kherson-special-forces-9cca826e96ca244a7fe-a12649ff154ac

Support Ukraine today or fight Russia tomorrow
https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/support-ukraine-today-or-fight-russia-tomorrow/

Russia’s invasion aims to erase Ukrainian cultural identity

How ‘blood gold’ from Africa is funding Russia’s war on Ukraine

More Ukrainian children from Ukraine’s Russia-held regions arrive in Belarus despite global outrage
https://apnews.com/article/belarus-russia-ukraine-war-children-6d8c5511b36030d9a361a3a5ba7f7f77

Russia pivots oil sales to India amid Ukraine sanctions

Russia Has New and Extended War Plans in Ukraine: ISW
RUSSIA/UKRAINE

For more on this theme:

Russia uses POWs as a political weapon against Kyiv

Fake TikTok accounts spread disinformation on Russia-Ukraine war to millions

Ukraine likely to ramp up sabotage inside Russia in the new year

Russia and Ukraine carry out largest prisoner exchange since war began

Ukraine war: What Russia's escalating air attacks mean

New malware found in analysis of Russian hacks on Ukraine, Poland

Putin’s $300bn Belongs to Ukraine
https://cepa.org/article/putins-300bn-belongs-to-ukraine/

Ukraine’s wartime economy is performing surprisingly well
https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/ukraines-wartime-economy-is-performing-surprisingly-well/

The EU Is Much Less Dependent On Russian Gas But Still Isn’t Ready To Give It Up

The European Union’s ‘Ukraine Fatigue’ Is Not All It Seems – Analysis
https://www.eurasiareview.com/19122023-the-european-unions-ukraine-fatigue-is-not-all-it-seems-analysis/

Central Asia: A Lucrative Back Door to Russia
https://cepa.org/article/central-asia-a-lucrative-back-door-to-russia/

The Limits Of A Russia-China Partnership That Claims To Have None – Analysis
https://www.eurasiareview.com/20122023-the-limits-of-a-russia-china-partnership-that-claims-to-have-none-analysis/

Ukraine 2024: Europe’s Year of Reckoning

How many Russian generals have been killed in Ukraine?

The Monster Returns: Stalin Looms Large Over Putin’s Russia – Analysis
RUSSIA/UKRAINE

For more on this theme:

How Ukraine’s research community has been decimated by war with Russia
https://www.fastcompany.com/91001235/ukraine-research-community-war

Will Putin agree to a Ukraine ceasefire in 2024?
https://theweek.com/defence/vladimir-putin-ukraine-ceasefire

War in Ukraine: In 2023, Russian disinformation continued to dominate