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COUNTERING TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME (CTOC)

CORRUPTION

Changing the game: A critical analysis of infrastructure corruption in Mega Sport Events
Tippi Creed-Waring – sportanddev.org: 28 January 2021

A report by NGO Engineers Against Poverty has found that large-scale corruption in sports infrastructure has led to poorly constructed facilities and inflated costs. The report claims that high costs, lack of monitoring and complex logistics create a "perfect storm for corruption."

Out of Jail on Bail, Zimbabwe Journalist Vows to Continue Denouncing Corruption
Columbus Mavhunga – Voice of America: 28 January 2021

Prominent Zimbabwean journalist Hopewell Chin’ono was detained for three weeks after police arrested him for “peddling falsehoods.” Chin’ono’s arrest – his third in six months — may be part of efforts by the government to stifle freedom of expression on social media, especially when it comes to anti-corruption reporting.

For more on this theme:
How to stop large-scale corruption in major sporting infrastructure projects

British Virgin Islands corruption scandal threatens its dependable tax haven reputation

Ten years on, Tunisians protest government, corruption

Lebanon: Systemic corruption problems require a systemic response

What You Need To Know About Morocco’s New Anti-corruption Bill

Zambia’s medical supply scandal makes anti-corruption a key electoral issue this year

The Silent Threat: The Impact of Fraud on UK National Security

Corruption threatening global COVID-19 recovery, says new report
DRUG TRAFFICKING

More Women Are Dealing Cocaine. This is Why.
Rebecca Tidy – VICE: 1 February 2021

Data from the United Kingdom Ministry of Justice shows a steep rise in the number of women involved in selling cocaine. Interviews with offenders reveal that many take part as a way out of poverty or to fund their own addiction.

https://www.vice.com/en/article/93w8gp/more-women-are-dealing-cocaine-this-is-why

For more on this theme:

How Advanced Technologies Can Fight Money Laundering by Drug Traffickers

Bolivia Rivers Become Increasingly Popular Drug Trafficking Routes

Increased risk for Nigerians as drug smugglers rebrand Tramadol

ORGANIZED CRIME

Organized Crime Groups Becoming More Violent and Targeting Ports
Homeland Security Today: 30 January 2021

The European Union is concerned about the escalating violence by organized crime groups, according to a new Europol report. The EU’s law enforcement agency found the uptick to be centered on major transit points and port cities where criminal gangs and trafficking groups tend to be entrenched.

https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/transportation/organized-crime-groups-becoming-more-violent-and-targeting-ports/

Full report:

Europol Spotlight - The use of violence by organised crime groups

For more on this theme:

Swedish Gangs Armed By Balkan Weapon Traffickers

Italian Prosecution Investigation Shows Mafia Attempts to Launder Money in Albania

Cachiros Money Laundering Cells Still Operate in Honduras

Is ransomware insurance funding a black market?
https://techhq.com/2021/01/is-ransomware-insurance-funding-a-black-market/
TRAFFICKING IN SCARCE OR PROTETED RESOURCES

COVID-19 contributed to decrease in rhino poaching – Creecy

defenceWeb: 1 February 2021

Poaching of rhinos, one of the world’s most endangered species, has been on the decline in South Africa ever since the country shut down due to the COVID-19 pandemic.


Commission proposes new measures to ban trade in ivory

European Commission: 28 January 2021

The European Union Commission is seeking public input on draft measures to ban the ivory trade. In its biodiversity strategy, the EU intends to contribute indirectly to the preservation of African elephants. Every year, more than 20,000 elephants are killed for their ivory.


For more on this theme:

Preventing pandemics through biodiversity conservation and smart wildlife trade regulation


Ivory by any other name: Illegal trade thrives on eBay, study finds


Nigeria emerges as Africa’s primary export hub for ivory, pangolin scales


International Guidelines Would Help Stem Illegal Activity Tied to At-Sea Transfer of Fish


Technology to count elephants from space offers anti-poaching hope

https://www.independent.co.uk/environment/wildlife-trade-campaign-study-elephants-b1790797.html

The former naval officer now leading Kenya's fight against poaching

https://www.independent.co.uk/environment/poaching-africa-illegal-wildlife-trade-b1789453.html

Laboratory comes up with technique to identify wildlife species from DNA


Brazil to end military-led program against Amazon logging

https://apnews.com/article/deforestation-brazil-jair-bolsonaro-forests-latin-america-7f1bb5d248e4e6873f97208f2434103c

WUR's alert system is helping to stop illegal logging in African rainforests

https://africanews.space/wur-alert-system-radd-african-rainforests/
HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND IRREGULAR MIGRATION

COVID-19 Made People Smuggling More Dangerous and Expensive

Refugees and migrants appear to be increasingly dependent on smugglers, which carries increased risks for all involved, according to a new survey.


Impact of COVID-19 on migrant smuggling


COVID-19 impact exposes millions to the risk of trafficking

Modern Diplomacy: 3 February 2021

A United Nations report finds that over the past year poverty arising from lost jobs or lost economic opportunities has increased the number of people vulnerable to trafficking. The number of trafficked children has tripled. Girls are mainly trafficked for sexual exploitation, while boys are used for forced labor.


For more on this theme:

Mexico human trafficking cases stall as coronavirus bites


Human trafficking cases in Thailand hit decade low due to COVID-19


Harsh new punishments for human trafficking planned


Western Sahara: A migrant smuggling hotspot

PROGRAM ON CYBER SECURITY STUDIES (PCSS)

INTERNET GOVERNANCE

Opinion: Russia is trying to set the rules for the Internet. The U.N. saw through the ruse.
David Ignatius – The Washington Post: 1 February 2021

Russia is engaged in a bold but little-noticed effort to set new rules for cyberspace — even as it flouts the existing ones. Recently, in an encouraging step, the United Nations International Telecommunications Union pushed back.
https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/02/01/russia-internet-rules-united-nations/

For more on this theme:
(Global) Can We Decentralize the Internet?
https://www.freethink.com/articles/decentralize-the-internet

(Global) Get ready for the death of the global internet. It won’t be pretty
https://www.wired.co.uk/article/internet-balkanisation-ian-levy

INTERNET FREEDOM

Internet connectivity drops in Myanmar after the military detains Aung San Suu Kyi and other leading politicians
Catherine Shu – Tech Crunch: 1 February 2021

Internet and phone connections in Myanmar, also known as Burma, are reportedly unstable, with online connectivity dipping to 50% as the country faces an apparent military coup and enters a state of emergency.

For more on this theme:
(Global) Internet blackouts skyrocket amid global political unrest

(India) India farmers’ protests: internet shutdown highlights Modi’s record of stifling digital dissent

(Cuba) Cuban internet access cut amid free expression protest; journalist harassed
https://cpj.org/2021/01/cuban-internet-access-cut-amid-free-expression-protest-journalist-harassed/
CYBER CAPACITY BUILDING

Three ways West Africa’s digitalisation can improve

According to a report by the African Union, a shift to digitalization is essential for successful development in West Africa. The report asserts that productivity gains and the added value of digital technology are essential for the successful implementation of “Agenda 2063” to transform Africa into the global powerhouse of the future.

https://www.theafricareport.com/60956/three-ways-west-africas-digitalisation-can-improve/

For more on this theme:

(Africa) Maritime cyber security – best practices and lessons learnt

(Europe, ASEAN) Filling the gaps in ASEAN and EU cybercrime cooperation

(Singapore) Singapore aims for global e-commerce excellence with focus on core infrastructures

CYBER ATTACKS, THREATS AND VULNERABILITIES

North Korea targeted cybersecurity researchers using a blend of hacking and espionage
Paulo Shakarian – The Conversation: 4 February 2021

Google has identified a North Korean government hacking group that is targeting cyber security researchers engaged in vulnerability studies. The group used multiple platforms to communicate with potential targets, including Twitter, LinkedIn, Telegram, Discord, Keybase and email.


Full report:

New campaign targeting security researchers
https://blog.google/threat-analysis-group/new-campaign-targeting-security-researchers/

For more on this theme:

(Global) New Trickbot module uses Masscan for local network reconnaissance

(U.K.) UKRI suspends services after ransomware attack

(Scotland) Hackers publish thousands of files after government agency refuses to pay ransom
CYBER CRIME

DDoS Attacks Increased Rapidly During the COVID-19 Pandemic as Hackers Exploited New Tools and Techniques
Alicia Hope – CPO Magazine: 29 January 2021

A report by A10 Networks says that distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks became a significant cyber security threat and nuisance in 2020. The firm’s threat intelligence report says that DDoS attacks became more intense and sophisticated during the COVID-19 pandemic as organizations struggled to support the remote workforce.

For more on this theme:
(Global) The hidden costs of cyber crime on government
https://www.itweb.co.za/content/JN1gP7OYLa8qjL6m

(Global) DDoS Extortion Groups Make New Ransom Demands as Bitcoin Price Surges

(Global) Fears over cyber crime tool that can build phishing pages in real-time
https://www.itpro.co.uk/security/phishing/358457/fears-over-cyber-crime-tool-that-can-build-phishing-pages-in-real-time

MASS SURVEILLANCE AND INTELLIGENCE GATHERING

Revealed: Massive Chinese Police Database
Yael Grauer – The Intercept: 29 January 2021

Millions of leaked police files detail substantial surveillance of China’s Uighur minority. Taken together, the materials provide a broad overview of how the extensive surveillance systems deployed in Xinjiang fit together to repress minority populations and how broadly they impact day-to-day life in the region.
https://theintercept.com/2021/01/29/china-uyghur-muslim-surveillance-police/

For more on this theme:
(India) Privacy fears as Indian city readies facial recognition to spot harassed women

(Global) Exploring National Cyber Security Strategies: Policy Approaches and Implications

(Singapore) Singapore Can Curb Covid and Crime With Your Data
https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2021-02-03/singaporeans-aren-t-wary-of-using-tracetogether-for-crime-yet
PROGRAM ON TERRORISM AND SECURITY STUDIES (PTSS)

ISIS AND FOREIGN FIGHTERS

ISIL-K’s new leader heads India operations; may have earlier affiliation with Haqqani network: UN
The Tribune: 4 February 2021

According to United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, the global terror group Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan’s (ISIL-K) new leader, Shihab al-Muhajir, heads its operations in India, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, the Maldives and Sri Lanka. He is said to have had an earlier affiliation with the dreaded Haqqani Network.

UN urges countries to repatriate 27,000 children from Syria

Vladimir Voronkov, the United Nations’ counterterrorism chief, told an informal meeting of the U.N. Security Council that “the horrific situation of the children in Al Hol [camp] is one of the most pressing issues in the world today.” Member states are reluctant to take these children due to security risks. The children at the Al Hol camp are vulnerable to be preyed on by ISIS enforcers and at risk of radicalization within the camp, Voronkov said.
https://apnews.com/article/counterterrorism-islamic-state-group-united-nations-syria-terror-ism-60a0f9f0dfb2937d8f34fe7967def30a

For more on this theme:
ISIS targeting women in northeast Syria – SDC chair Ilham Ehmed
https://ahvalnews.com/ilham-ahmed/isis-targeting-women-northeast-syria-sdc-chair-ilham-ehmed

Islamic State tries to shore up relevance with Iraq carnage

The Islamic State in Mozambique
https://www.lawfareblog.com/islamic-state-mozambique

ISIS Seeks Political Gains in Iraq as it Shifts Tactics

Senior Islamic State figure killed in Iraq, PM says

Ukraine woman starts fresh after life under Islamic State

Islamic State relies on money transfers from sympathizers in Turkey, Iraq: Report
TERRORISM AROUND THE WORLD

Spike in Militant Islamist Violence in Africa Underscores Shifting Security Landscape
Africa Center for Strategic Studies: 29 January 2021

A surge of violent events by militant Islamist groups in Africa, led by escalations in the Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin, is widening instability.

Hacking Group Linked To Hezbollah Reportedly Accessed Telecoms and ISPs Around The World
Rim Zrein – The961: January 2021

Hezbollah’s cyber unit has apparently hacked into telecoms and internet service providers. The firm ClearSky Security said it has identified at least 250 servers hacked by Lebanese Cedar, a group linked to the Hezbollah terrorist group.
https://www.the961.com/hacking-group-hezbollah-telecoms-isps-world/

For more on this theme:

Iran Hosts Taliban to ‘Exchange Views’ on US-backed Afghan Peace Process

Taliban backs vaccine drive as Afghan government receives $112 million funding pledge

Is Algeria once again confronted with the threat of terrorism?

Haqqani Network discussed forming new unit with al-Qaeda: US document

The roots of Boko Haram and why its terrorist advance won’t stop
https://www.lifegate.com/boko-haram-attacks-history

Pakistani Militant Leader Killed In Afghanistan

In Algerian mountains, army operation shows persistent militant threat
https://www.reuters.com/article/us-algeria-security-idUSKBN2A217A

Al Qaeda’s “Expansion Project” targets Côte d’Ivoire, Benin

Pentagon Warns Taliban on Failure to Meet Commitments on Violence, Terrorism
RADICALIZATION AND MESSAGING

Evidence must guide terrorism prevention in Benin and Togo

Among civil society and the media in Benin and Togo, the understanding about what causes and drives violent extremism is limited and shaped by preconceived ideas that aren’t based on evidence. Knowledge about those involved in terrorism — their objectives, strategies and motivations for associating with violent extremist groups — is also poor. This will ultimately lead to failure in their counterterrorism prevention efforts.


For more on this theme:

Against the Clock: Can the EU’s New Strategy for Terrorist Content Removal Work?

Radicalization in the EU: What is it? How can it be prevented?
https://www.eureporter.co/defence/terrorism-2/2021/02/03/radicalization-in-the-eu-what-is-it-how-can-it-be-prevented/

Parents can help steer youth away from online radicalization

ISD adjusts approach to rehabilitation as radicals get younger

IRREGULAR WARFARE: SOFT POWER

China looks to Winter Olympics as chance for rare soft power win amid COVID-19, rights concerns
Gabriel Crossley – Reuters: 2 February 2021

China is facing global scrutiny over a range of issues, notably the mass internment of Uighur Muslims, its clampdown in Hong Kong and its initial handling of COVID-19. China hopes the Winter Olympics in 2022 will give it the soft power boost it so desperately wants.


For more on this theme:

India Launches ‘Neighborly Vaccine Diplomacy’

The 3 Pillars of Chinese Foreign Policy: The State, the Party, the People
https://thediplomat.com/2021/02/the-3-pillars-of-chinese-foreign-policy-the-state-the-party-the-people/
IRREGULAR WARFARE: PROXY FORCES
Outside Powers Are Making the Conflict in the Central African Republic Worse
John A. Lechner and Alexandra Lamarche – Foreign Policy: 22 January 2021
Proxy wars pitting France and Chad against Russia and Rwanda threaten to destabilize the entire region while subjecting Central Africans to more violence and instability.

For more on this theme:
Experts: Iran Eyes Reuniting Its ‘Axis of Resistance’
Erdogan using deniable private militias to destabilize the Middle East
https://www.arabnews.com/node/1802716
Iran Sends Missiles to Iraqi Hezbollah in East Syria

IRREGULAR WARFARE: DISINFORMATION AND MALIGN INFLUENCE
Russia Has a Vaccine. The World Has Questions
Patrick Tucker – Defense One: 2 February 2021
Russia’s release of its Sputnik V COVID-19 vaccine has been plagued by questions about its effectiveness, the manner in which it was tested and the country’s disinformation campaign against Western vaccines. But the biggest question is whether Russia can use its new vaccine to spread its malign influence.
https://www.defenseone.com/technology/2021/02/russia-has-vaccine-world-has-questions/171816/

For more on this theme:
Reps. Spanberger, Katko introduce bill to combat online disinformation
Biden’s Pick for UN Envoy Grilled on China at Confirmation Hearing
China’s Foreign Policy Weapons: Technology, Coercion, Corruption
https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2021-01-25/china-s-geopolitical-weapons-technology-coercion-corruption
Don’t underestimate Russia’s capabilities, influence on the global stage, says Stanford scholar
https://news.stanford.edu/2021/02/02/dont-underestimate-russias-capabilities-influence-global-stage/