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COUNTERING TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME (CTOC)

CORRUPTION

Wartime Ukraine ranks among world’s top performers in anti-corruption index
Peter Dickinson – Atlantic Council: 1 February 2024

Ukraine recorded solid progress in 2023 in its long struggle with corruption, according to Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index.


Thousands rally in Slovakia to accuse new government’s plan of going easier on corruption
The Associated Press: 7 February 2024

Protesters condemn a plan by the new government of populist Prime Minister Robert Fico to eliminate the office of the special prosecutor dealing with major crime and corruption.

https://apnews.com/article/slovakia-penal-code-protests-prime-minister-65274f8782149729ff8c5b1f-3c8f05f7

For more on this theme:

Ukraine’s fight to root out corruption

Zelensky’s Corruption Problem
https://www.newsweek.com/ukraine-zelensky-corruption-problem-1863644

Can Guatemala’s New President Reignite Fight Against Corruption and Crime?

Committing to Combat Kleptocracy: A Guide for OGP Members
https://www.ndi.org/publications/committing-combat-kleptocracy-guide-ogp-members

Kenya’s president blames corruption and incompetence for huge fireball that hurt hundreds in Nairobi
https://apnews.com/article/kenya-fire-68dd1c1e73998c6b4e392b3d79e10d12

‘Reputational damage’: Singapore’s ruling party grapples with scandal

Chinese nuclear fuel engineer Li Guangchang caught in anti-corruption net targeting ‘high-risk’ areas

Vanished kids and rampant corruption: Horrors behind Turkey’s earthquake linger
https://www.politico.eu/article/a-year-on-from-turkeys-earthquake-devastation-continues/
DRUG TRAFFICKING

From drug trafficking to tobacco: Cigarettes become a new branch of business for Mexican cartels
Karina Suárez – El País: 5 February 2024
The black market in cigarettes accounts for up to 30% of a $25 billion smuggling industry.

What Is Behind the Criminal Conflict Raging in Chiapas, Mexico?
Juliana Manjarrés – InSight Crime: 8 February 2024
The new year started with a surge in violence between the Sinaloa Cartel and Jalisco Cartel New Generation in what is just the latest flare-up of a prolonged conflict between the rival groups.

For more on this theme:
Honduras ex-police chief pleads guilty to US drug charge before ex-president’s trial
Hitwomen on the Rise in Latin American Cartels
https://dialogo-americas.com/articles/hitwomen-on-the-rise-in-latin-american-cartels/
Ecuador’s crackdown on violent crime helped turn the country into a narco state
https://theconversation.com/ecuadors-crackdown-on-violent-crime-helped-turn-the-country-into-a-narco-state-220920
Police Officers Fighting Drug Trafficking And Gangs In Marseille
US and China launch talks on fentanyl trafficking in a sign of cooperation amid differences
https://apnews.com/article/china-us-fentanyl-opioid-precursor-b296aebe56a3df511103ff3b2790c6450
Jordan: Crackdown on Syrian drugs, weapons depends on deals
How Rosario Became Argentina’s Drug Violence Capital
Only the Truth Will Set Mexico Free … From Cartels
https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/only-truth-will-set-mexico-freefrom-cartels
‘Cocaine for the poor’ threatens lives in Morocco
https://issafrica.org/iss-today/cocaine-for-the-poor-threatens-lives-in-morocco
International drug smuggling operation stuffs meth into baby dolls
TRAFFICKING IN SCARCE OR PROTECTED RESOURCES

Inside the Crime Rings Trafficking Sand
David A. Taylor – Scientific American: 1 February 2024
Organized crime is mining sand from rivers and coasts to feed demand worldwide, ruining ecosystems and communities. Can it be stopped?
https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/sand-mafias-are-plundering-the-earth/

From murder to mining, threats abound in Colombian Amazon Indigenous reserves
Dora Montero – Mongabay: 5 February 2024
A reporting team analyzed the impact of environmental crimes in 320 reserves that are part of the country’s Amazon biome.

For more on this theme:
Unilateral efforts to combat illegal fishing may spur piracy in certain regions

‘Leave the gold in the ground’: Ecuador’s forest guardians mobilise against illegal mining in Amazon

Forensic science combats wildlife trafficking
https://news.vt.edu/articles/2024/02/cnre-wildlife-forensic-center.html

Singapore court gets tough on rhino horn smuggler

An ASU professor is cracking open the weirdly profitable world of criminal bug smuggling
https://www.12news.com/article/life/animals/asu-professor-insect-smuggling-arizona-trade-weird-profitt75-ca0f6819-7b6f-4b55-aff5-0678b6eeb78a

Global efforts in curbing wildlife crime not enough

Liberia: Boakai’s Justice Minister Pick is A Serial Illegal Logger

Illegal sand mining in Goa – Seeking solutions

Illegal mining a “war on economy” says South African mining minister
ORGANIZED CRIME

Russia, Ukraine, and organized crime and illicit economies in 2024
Vanda Felbab-Brown and Diana Paz García – Brookings: 6 February 2024

Moscow’s war significantly affected regional illicit economies and criminal networks, but the basic power balance between the Russian state and criminal groups has not changed.

Organized crime declares war: The road to chaos in Ecuador
Felipe Botero Escobar – Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime: 2 February 2024

For years, Ecuador enjoyed a relative degree of peace. However, things have changed dramatically, and President Daniel Noboa said the country was in internal armed conflict against 22 criminal groups that he called narco-terrorists.
https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/the-road-to-chaos-ecuador/

For more on this theme:

Mexico: the world’s crime market par excellence
https://english.elpais.com/international/2024-02-02/mexico-the-worlds-crime-market-par-excellence.html

How Chinese mafia run a scam factory in Myanmar

Pacific Islands: Spillover threats from transnational organised crime

Organized Crime Advances in Amazon Basin

Number of organized-crime related homicides in Mexico from 2009 to 2020

Democracy Dialogues: Battling Organized Crime in Haiti, Guatemala, and Beyond

How the Kremlin uses Italian organized crime groups to sponsor pro-Russian forces in Slovakia
https://lansinginstitute.org/2024/02/05/how-the-kremlin-uses-italian-organized-crime-groups-to-sponsor-pro-russian-forces-in-slovakia/

Organized crime, including Mexican cartels, smuggling migrants to Canada
PROGRAM ON CYBER SECURITY STUDIES (PCSS)

INTERNET FREEDOM

Censorship, AI, Disinformation, and Repression Undermine Asia’s Elections
Mong Palatino – The Diplomat: 29 January 2024

Old forms of repression, fortified by new technologies, have altered the political atmosphere across the region.

For more on this theme:

(Global) Report: election wave will bring tsunami of internet shutdowns

(Africa) Are Some African Governments Threatened By The Capabilities Of Starlink?

(Global) The Repressive Power of Artificial Intelligence

(Sudan) The International Community Must Protect Internet Freedom: A Lesson From Sudan

CYBER STRATEGY AND RISKS

Is ASEAN Ready for Asia’s First Cyber War?
Gavin Harris – The National Interest: 1 February 2024

What is the threat to ASEAN countries, and are their militaries equipped to respond?
https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/asean-ready-asia%E2%80%99s-first-cyber-war-208998

For more on this theme:

(Philippines) Expanding scope of national security: From maritime to digital domains

(U.S., Global) Navy looking to increase cyber partnerships with foreign nations
https://defensescoop.com/2024/01/26/navy-cyber-partnerships-foreign-nations-increase/

(UK) UK government charges ahead in national cyber strategy

(Ireland) Cyber Ireland unveils strategy to grow cyber security sector by 2030
CYBER CAPACITY BUILDING

Singapore Moves Ahead to Establish the ASEAN Regional CERT to Strengthen Regional Cybersecurity
CSA Singapore: 2 February 2024

The country is working closely with members to establish the ASEAN Regional Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT) to promote and facilitate information-sharing on cyber incidents.


For more on this theme:
(Australia, South Pacific) Australians know about ‘Fibre to the Premises’, but what about ‘Fibre to the Pacific’?
(Nepal) Govt all set to establish the National Cybersecurity Center. How is it going to work?

CYBERATTACKS

Philippine lawmakers demand briefing following China-linked cyberattack
Alexander Martin – The Record: 5 February 2024

The government’s announcement that it repelled an attack from hackers prompts an urgent call for a meeting on the national security issue.

https://therecord.media/philippine-lawmakers-demand-briefing-on-china-linked-cyberattack

For more on this theme:
(U.S.) Cyberattacks on Guam could sap US forces in Indo-Pacific, Nakasone says
(U.S., Global) 23andMe: Raw genetic data stolen in months-long cyberattack
(U.S.) Cyberattack on Pennsylvania courts didn’t appear to compromise data, officials say
(Albania) Albania’s Institute of Statistics suffers cyberattack, some systems affected
CYBERCRIME

South Korea’s National Intelligence Service Reveals North Korean Hackers’ New AI Strategy
Sharad Natani – The 27:420 January 2024

The hackers utilize generative artificial intelligence for planning attacks, raising concerns globally about AI’s role in cybersecurity.


For more on this theme:
(Nigeria) Nigeria’s Cybersecurity Challenge: Four Steps To Curb Cybercrime
https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbestechcouncil/2024/02/06/nigerias-cybersecurity-challenge-four-steps-to-curb-cybercrime/?sh=3235591d34ce

(India) Kerala Police get more teeth to fight cyber crimes

(Global) Teens Committing Scary Cybercrimes: What’s Behind the Trend?
https://www.darkreading.com/threat-intelligence/teens-committing-scary-cybercrimes-trend

PROTECTION OF CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

GAO: Federal agencies lack insight on ransomware protections for critical infrastructure
Matt Bracken – CyberScoop: 30 January 2024

The United States Government Accountability Office finds that agencies overseeing key infrastructure don’t know if defenses have been adopted.


For more on this theme:
(Global) Global critical infrastructure faces relentless cyber activity
https://www.helpnetsecurity.com/2024/01/29/ot-persistent-attacks/

(Ukraine, Russia) Series of Cyberattacks Hit Ukrainian Critical Infrastructure Organizations

(U.S., Iran) US sanctions Iranian military hackers for attacks on water facilities
https://therecord.media/sanctions-iran-hackers-us-water-utilities-attacks
PROGRAM ON TERRORISM AND SECURITY STUDIES (PTSS)

TERRORISM AROUND THE WORLD

UN experts: Terrorist threat is high in Africa conflict zones and Afghanistan, and rose in Europe
Edith M. Lederer – The Associated Press: 1 February 2024

They say the terrorist threat from al-Qaida, the Islamic State group and their affiliates remains high.

https://apnews.com/article/al-qaida-islamic-state-terrorist-threats-africa-afghanistan-162c899b2ed-71c7be1724eb03ece772b

For more on this theme:

Deaths Linked to Militant Islamist Violence in Africa Continue to Spiral

Engaging With the Taliban Doesn’t Work
https://thediplomat.com/2024/01/engaging-with-the-taliban-doesnt-work/

Madrasahs Go Mainstream: Taliban To Grant University Degrees To Religious Students In New Blow To Secular Education
https://www.rferl.org/a/afghanistan-madrasahs-taliban-secular-education-degrees-diplomas/32791896.html

Data Collection in Online Terrorism and Extremism Research: Future Directions

Pakistan Under Threat: Why ISKP’s Online Campaign Against Pakistan is a Global Concern
https://gnet-research.org/2024/02/01/pakistan-under-threat-why-iskps-online-campaign-against-pakistan-is-a-global-concern/

Telegram’s Role in Amplifying Tehreek-e-Taliban’s Umar Media Propaganda and Sympathiser Outreach

Female Jihadis Facing Justice: Comparing Approaches in Europe

The Increasing Threat of Foreign and Domestic Terrorism
https://amuedge.com/the-increasing-threat-of-foreign-and-domestic-terrorism/

Combating the financing of terrorism: A never-ending battle
https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/01/31/business/top-business/combating-the-financing-of-terrorism-a-never-ending-battle/1930439
ISRAEL/HAMAS
2-state solution remains key to ending Israel-Hamas war, Sullivan says
Katherine Long – Politico: 4 February 2024

United States President Joe Biden remains keen on such a plan as a resolution, national security adviser Jake Sullivan said.


For more on this theme:

What the U.S. recognizing a Palestinian state would mean

Has Diplomacy Run Its Course in the Israel-Hamas War?
https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/has-diplomacy-run-its-course-israel-hamas-war

The Israel-Hamas War: The Humanitarian Crisis in Gaza

What is Iran’s ‘Axis of Resistance,’ and Which Groups Are Involved?

Palestinian Terrorist Organizations, Pioneers of Global Terrorism: Is Hamas Entering the Global Arena?
https://ict.org.il/palestinian-terrorist-organizations-pioneers-of-global-terrorism-is-hamas-enter-

Scoop: U.S., allies hope to soon announce steps to end Israel-Hezbollah fighting
https://www.axios.com/2024/02/06/israel-lebanon-hezbollah-biden-gaza

What is Hezbollah and how is it linked to the Israel-Gaza war? I Start Here
https://www.aljazeera.com/program/start-here/2024/2/1/hezbollah-explained-start-here

Explainer: How Hamas Ended Up on US List of Terrorist Groups
https://www.voanews.com/a/explainer-how-hamas-ended-up-on-us-list-of-terrorist-groups/747822.

Hamas victims file class action against Binance over allegedly facilitating terrorism financing
https://cryptoslate.com/hamas-victims-file-class-action-against-binance-over-allegedly-facilitating-

Who is part of Iran’s regional armed network?
https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/who-is-part-of-irans-regional-armed-network

Hezbollah-Linked Media Spread Falsehoods to Undermine US Efforts to Secure Red Sea from Houthi Attacks
https://www.polygraph.info/a/fact-check-hezbollah-linked-media-spread-falsehoods-to-undermine-us-

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Israel issues its most detailed warning yet to Hezbollah, while the war in Gaza marks 4 months
https://apnews.com/article/israel-hamas-war-news-02-03-2024-c0a63ab330a8915d684d4461edc5ec5e

Why Choosing the Right Historical Approach to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Matters

Israel and Hamas are far apart on a Gaza cease-fire and hostage deal. What are the sticking points?
https://apnews.com/article/israel-gaza-hostages-ceasefire-9f57efb1a01afebb9a921cfeb01648bb

What’s in Hamas’s 135-day proposal for a Gaza truce?

Hamas shows signs of return in Gaza City after Israel withdraws most of its troops from area

Analysis shows destruction and possible buffer zone along Gaza Strip’s border with Israel
https://apnews.com/article/israel-palestinians-war-gaza-strip-buffer-zone-72a782ddd532a4331b660a735e36ac0

Israel making progress in tunnel hunt for Hamas leader Sinwar, Israeli officials say
https://www.axios.com/2024/02/05/netanyahu-gaza-war-hamas-sinwar-tunnels

UN: Gaza Crisis Deepens as Donor Nations Cut Aid

U.S. Policy and the Israel-Hamas War: A Conversation with Ambassador David Satterfield
https://carnegieendowment.org/2024/02/16/u.s.-policy-and-israel-hamas-war-conversation-with-ambassador-david-satterfield-event-8239

Has the Gaza War Helped Hezbollah?
https://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/91573

The Day After in Gaza: Four Post-War Scenarios
https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/91561

The EU is worried that Israel might extend the war in Gaza to a ‘pressure cooker’ town near Egypt
https://apnews.com/article/israel-palestinians-eu-gaza-rafah-62d7272225a016fd51122f57cfd04f

Israel-Palestine: A chance to end the cycle of conflict
ISRAEL/HAMAS

For more on this theme:

Microsoft uncovers extensive Iranian AI-based cyber ops against Israel amid Gaza war
https://www.calcalistech.com/ctechnews/article/syknxaxot

An Israeli Diplomatic Strategy To Undercut Hamas Propaganda – Analysis

Qatar’s Gaza War Mediation May Be A Double-Edged Sword – Analysis

RUSSIA/UKRAINE

The anniversary of war in Ukraine — 10 years, not two years
Andrew Maher – The Strategist: 7 February 2024
In the coming weeks, a flood of analysis can be expected marking the end of the second year. In fact, the war began 10 years ago when Russia seized Crimea.

For more on this theme:

Ukraine: Digital government is central to resilience
https://www.brookings.edu/articles/ukraine-digital-government-is-central-to-resilience/

Europe and NATO are stepping up on Ukraine
https://www.brookings.edu/articles/europe-and-nato-are-stepping-up-on-ukraine/

An Australian strategy for improved aid to Ukraine
https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/australian-strategy-improved-aid-ukraine

In Year Three of the Ukraine War, It’s Time to Learn the Lessons of the First Two

Making Attrition Work: A Viable Theory of Victory for Ukraine

Russia’s Frozen Assets Present a Policy Dilemma
https://carnegieendowment.org/politika/91556

Amid Frontline Stalemate, Kyiv Targets Ukraine’s Beleaguered Diaspora in Russia
https://carnegieendowment.org/politika/91536

A long war works against Ukraine — and the West’s own security
https://www.chathamhouse.org/2024/02/long-war-works-against-ukraine-and-wests-own-security
RUSSIA/UKRAINE

For more on this theme:

How peace in Ukraine might be negotiated

Putin casts the Ukraine conflict as a fight for Russia’s survival as he seeks reelection
https://apnews.com/article/russia-putin-election-822c76b8ee3665a04d57ced0b42b225

The EU is providing Ukraine with $54 billion. How will the money be spent?
https://apnews.com/article/ukraine-russia-war-eu-aid-funding-orban-support-european-189a9efd57709b-4feb130a99189feb4

Experts react: The EU just approved a 50 billion euro aid package for Ukraine.
How will it impact the war?

Russia’s frozen assets are generating billions. The EU is getting ready to send them to Ukraine

The UN’s top court says it has jurisdiction in part of Ukraine’s genocide case against Russia
https://apnews.com/article/ukraine-russia-genocide-court-un-icj-c3f9cf7462cd85e73ab53aa9499093f4

Two years into the Russia-Ukraine war: A conversation with Norwegian Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide

Ukraine: New Findings on Russia’s Devastation of Mariupol
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Ukraine needs more troops fighting Russia. Hardened professionals from Colombia are helping
https://apnews.com/article/ukraine-colombian-foreign-fighters-professional-soldiers-07b5cb7949bd10234e7456f9c1c20b08

Paparo Says Ukraine Aid Will Help Deter China in Indo-Pacific

‘I have no fear’: How Ukrainian tech founders are outlasting Russia’s war
https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2024/2/2/how-ukrainian-tech-founders-operate-during-war

Dozens detained as Russian soldiers’ wives call for their return from Ukraine
https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-war-soldiers-wives-relatives-flowers-tomb-2696878af-c7d7b2b357d2f682343de4f
RUSSIA/UKRAINE

For more on this theme:

Speech by President von der Leyen at the European Parliament Plenary on the need for unwavering EU support for Ukraine, after two years of Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine

EU sanctions against Russia explained

Infographic – Impact of sanctions on the Russian economy

Infographic – Refugees from Ukraine in the EU

Russian politician denounces Ukraine war, wants to be ‘free from Putin’s shackles’
https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/russian-politician-denounces-ukraine-war-wants-to-be-free-from-putins-shackles

Ukraine opens new front with drone strikes on Russia’s energy sector

Taking Stock of ICJ Decisions in the ‘Ukraine v. Russia’ Cases — And implications for South Africa’s case against Israel

UN nuclear chief says security is still fragile at Ukraine’s Russian-occupied nuclear power plant
https://apnews.com/article/ukraine-russia-nuclear-plant-grossi-united-nations-b4d-de8c004f8a12d44c999755e108639

US, NATO Reaffirm Need to Support Ukraine
https://www.voanews.com/a/russian-missile-attacks-target-kyiv-mykolaiv/7477408.html

Russia’s war in Ukraine has had an unlikely consequence — it has revived the EU’s plans to get even bigger
https://www.cnbc.com/2024/02/05/in-russias-backyard-of-the-balkans-eu-enlargement-plans-are-back-in-focus.html

Ukraine’s army is suffering artillery ‘shell hunger’

The Week In Russia: Truce Talk
RUSSIA/UKRAINE

For more on this theme:

Black Sea Successes and Ukraine's Path to Victory
https://cepa.org/article/black-sea-successes-and-ukraines-path-to-victory/

Behind the Lines: Inside the Resistance Sabotaging Putin's Plans for Ukraine

Ukraine Faces Internal Challenges as It Enters Third Year of Russia’s War

How Ukraine can defeat Russia, according to NATO’s former Deputy Secretary General

Exclusive: China tells Ukraine to remove its firms from ‘sponsors of war’ list

Ukraine: Is Europe starting to change its strategy?

ICJ Issues Preliminary Objections Judgment in Ukraine v. Russia

EU capitals fear Russian retaliation and cyberattacks after asset freezes

Ukraine Military Situation: Trends Suggest Further Russian Gains Likely – Analysis

Storm Gladiator: How Russia Uses Recruited Convicts To Fight In ‘Fierce’ Assault Units In Ukraine – Analysis