

THE GLOBAL INITIATIVE
AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL
ORGANIZED CRIME



**Organized crime
and its role in
contemporary
conflict**

An analysis of UN Security
Council Resolutions

POLICY NOTE



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Acknowledgements

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Summary

This brief aims to contribute to the basis of evidence for ongoing debates over the complex connections between criminal markets and conflict actors, organized-criminal groups and their use of violence in conflict settings. It presents a thorough analysis of the content of the UN Security Council (UNSC) resolutions from 2000 to 2017, according to references made within the resolutions to forms of organized crime. Security Council resolutions provide a comprehensive overview of major threats to global peace and security and so provide a rich documentary resource for analysis and an indicator of the dynamics of contemporary conflict. It is an indicator that is wide-ranging, both in terms of global scope and in reflecting conflict trends over time. The dataset that forms the basis of this analysis has been developed into an interactive tool, which is available from the website of the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.¹

Introduction

Organized crime has emerged as a major factor in many contemporary and protracted conflicts, often exacerbating levels of violence, insurgencies and state fragility. An ever-growing body of evidence indicates that illicit networks play a role in all stages of conflict – from the motivations behind its onset, to entrenched dynamics of violence, such as the financing of armed groups, and complications in ensuring a sustainable solution.

Criminal interests and associated corrupt connections have been widely identified as a major spoiler of peace processes. The UN System, across its numerous bodies and mechanisms, and in particular its peace operations, is now more than ever operating in contexts where both political and criminal actors may be making competing claims to power and engaging in acts of violence. Negotiating between these different interests to achieve sustainable peaceful solutions is a major challenge for the UN System going forward.

The UNSC has recognized this growing convergence of criminal activity, illicit markets and conflict by drawing repeated attention to the need to integrate crime-prevention initiatives into the mandates of UN peacekeeping operations, mission assessment and planning, conflict analysis and prevention strategies. It has, in recent years, introduced more of a focus on illicit networks into the mandates of peacekeeping operations, encouraging new approaches to the changing face of modern conflict.

The analysis that informs this report finds that of the 1 113 UNSC resolutions passed between 2000 and 2017, 35% mentioned certain forms of organized crime. But the share has been increasing. Each year from 2012 to 2017, more than 60% of the resolutions have mandated a response to criminal flows and markets, reaching a peak in 2014 of 63.5%. That the Security Council, whose remit is centred on major global threats to peace and security, has so consistently concerned itself with criminal groups and markets in recent years is a remarkable trend. The analysis provides a

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quantitative basis illustrating the Security Council's growing preoccupation with criminal markets, and illustrates key narratives connecting illicit markets to the dynamics of most contemporary conflicts.

This data shows that the mandates to UN agencies and peacekeeping operations formulated by the Security Council have shifted fundamentally in recent years. This has significant and wide-ranging implications for how the UN responds to peace-and-security concerns at all stages of a conflict: from prevention, to defusing and managing existing conflicts, and sustainable, effective peacebuilding and consolidation. It also has an impact on wider UN priorities, such as better management of humanitarian resources, migration trends, environmental concerns and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The brief aims to provide an overview both of how the UN System has been grappling with – and attempting to adapt to – its changing priorities and challenges; present the findings of our analysis and describe the key trends that our data reflects; and to use these findings to provide recommendations on how the Security Council may better guide peacekeeping missions and agencies to counter the complex, volatile environments where organized crime and conflict intersect.

Context

It has been increasingly recognized in recent years that organized crime has become a major threat within current and protracted conflicts, which poses challenges to multilateral peace operations in terms of how they pursue their mandate in a sustainable way. The World Development Report 2011,² for example, provided a watershed moment, bringing this non-traditional form of security threat to international recognition. It reported that organized violence – including organized-criminal groups – constituted the major obstacle to global sustainable development. The annual States of Fragility reports from the OECD have likewise increasingly recognized multidimensional threats in recent years, which include organized crime within conflict and fragile contexts.³ The 2018 iteration of this report identifies the flourishing of illicit economies and criminal networks in fragile states as one of the 10 most important trends that currently affect the fragility landscape.

Evidently, criminal agendas and the political landscape may intersect in many different ways according to the particular context, so that separating 'criminal' and 'conflict' actors may often be a naive and optimistic endeavour.⁴

Control over illicit markets and extra-legal exploitation of natural resources can provide funding to armed groups, which facilitates the continuation of conflict and provides an incentive for continued instability. In such contexts, the aims of combatants may shift towards more economic, criminal activities, or criminal groups may gain power and legitimacy in the absence of effective state institutions. Illegal resource exploitation becomes a crucial part of such 'war economies'. Reports from the UN's stabilization mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), for example, indicate that almost all the armed groups involved in the conflict in the DRC have, at some stage, engaged in illegal exploitation of the vast natural resources in the region.⁵ Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Sierra Leone and many other countries may tell a similar story.⁶

Nor is this limited to exploitation of natural resources: reports have emerged of combatants in Syria who are engaged in the looting and trade in the region's rich cultural property.⁷ And control over human smuggling and trafficking routes have become a key source of revenue for armed groups in Libya.⁸ Exploitation of these markets provides the means for conflict actors to support themselves, and for criminal groups to gain power and influence.

In other contexts, peace operations may inadvertently become a partner and facilitator of criminal actors by co-opting actors with criminal links and localized political influence into roles in peacemaking initiatives and allowing them to become influential in nascent government institutions. A well-known example where this occurred is Kosovo, where



the entrenched links between the Kosovo Liberation Army and the Albanian mafia subsequently developed into ties between criminal activities and government officials and institutions, and the hollowing out of state structures.⁹ Thanks to the ever-present intermingling between the political and the criminal in conflict contexts – as outlined above – the challenge for peacebuilders of separating out overtly criminal actors in the hope of building sustainable institutions is a complex one.

Peace operations and criminal actors cross paths in a whole host of other ways: the continued strength of illicit markets, such as human trafficking and drug markets, undermines post-conflict recovery and drives continued instability;¹⁰ then there are criminal activities of former combatants during disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes, and criminal financing of post-conflict transitions of power. Directives of the Security Council may also inadvertently fuel organized-criminal activity through their operations and the presence of peacekeepers, for example by engaging in illicit markets¹¹ or imposing sanctions regimes that may promote illicit means of subverting such sanctions.¹² The challenges that organized crime poses to peacekeeping efforts may therefore be direct – as criminal actors engage in political and military action – or more indirect as an additional cause of fragility. Overall, organized-crime groups pose a threat to the long-term effectiveness of peace operations.

The UN System has been grappling with this wide-ranging and ever-increasing body of evidence, and the experiences of its own personnel for some years. Calls for a more integrated response, one that acknowledges and proactively fights against the central role of illicit networks in conflict, have come from some of the highest echelons in the UN machinery. In May 2018, the Security Council used a presidential statement to call member states to action on transnational organized-crime groups in fragile states, particularly drawing attention to the links between such groups and international terrorism.¹³ This echoes warnings made in previous presidential statements. For example, in 2009 the council noted its concern over organized crime, and particularly drug-trafficking groups, as threats to peace and security.¹⁴ The secretary general subsequently echoed this call, connecting the need to integrate counter-crime initiatives more widely into peacekeeping – the much discussed ‘one UN’ approach.¹⁵ A 2016 external review of the functions, structure and capacity of the UN Police division (UNPOL) found that the division is currently insufficiently integrated into the design and planning of the peace operation mandate, and voiced concerns over whether resources could be allocated to rectify this.¹⁶

However, it has been noted that these statements and calls for action – which have now been consistent within UN leadership for several years – have not been met with a systematic and cohesive response. Awareness of the increasingly pervasive threat of organized crime has not yet translated into a tangible or pragmatic response, or allocation of new resources. For example, policies and strategies for the field, and guidance on engaging criminal actors have not yet been offered to field personnel, as might be expected, despite the repeated insistence on the issue from the Security Council and other high-level UN bodies.¹⁷ Considerations of organized crime are, even now, often absent from mandates and unaccounted-for in providing capacities and resources.¹⁸ The net effect is that field operations, while aware of the issue and called to act upon it by the Security Council, are often not sufficiently equipped to do so.

Nevertheless, some peace operations have responded to local challenges surrounding criminal activity and created innovative responses to organized-crime groups. MINUSMA,¹⁹ for example, has invested a great deal of resources into its analytical capabilities with the aim of better understanding the political economy of organized crime in the region.²⁰ MONUSCO, similarly, has created a dedicated Criminal Networks Task Force in December 2016, to better understand the

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long-standing impact of criminal networks on insecurity in eastern DRC. In 2017 the task force primarily targeted the illegal charcoal trade in North Kivu, acting on intelligence-gathering work to lead targeted military operations, conduct demand-reduction work and support criminal-justice operations. The decision to form the task force followed Security Council Resolution 2277, which renewed MONUSCO's mandate and noted the destabilizing influence of criminal networks in the region involved in exploiting natural resources. More broadly, our analysis showed that over 91% of all resolutions relating to the DRC during the 2000 to 2017 period made some reference to forms of organized crime, showing how consistently the Security Council has recognized illicit trade as a driving force behind conflict in the region. For Mali, similarly, it was found that every resolution relating to either Mali or the Sahel region more broadly referenced organized crime.

However, the prevailing consensus is that progress on integrating counter-crime initiatives into peace operations has been limited, and the UN System has taken a cautious approach. This leaves operations working without necessary guidance and attempting to use structures and strategies designed for dealing with non-state armed political actors to engage criminal groups. Several factors have been noted as underlying this hesitant response. These include a simple lack of coordination between the peacekeeping and criminal-justice branches of the UN System²¹ and a degree of vagueness in current mandates, leaving key decision-making up to individual personnel.

The issues of multilateral operations needing to rely on the consent of host governments to operate and the capacity for counter-crime initiatives to expose corrupt links and disrupt powerful actors have also been highlighted as stumbling blocks.²² Current efforts to suppress criminal markets within conflict contexts have tended to focus on cutting off violent actors from resources that could be illegally exploited, whereas (in a strategy often related to reliance on host-government consent) less attention has been paid to existing links between influential political actors and control over illicit flows. These actors may be able to take advantage of their control over illicit flows and the threat of organized-crime-related violence to influence negotiations and settlements. Without effective strategies to decouple such links during peace processes, multilateral operations may inadvertently legitimize illicit flows in political and state institutions, and newly consolidating states.²³ Crucially, the limited capacity of current operations to accurately analyze the political economy of illicit markets and understand the aims and strengths of criminal actors also underlies the hesitant response and unwillingness to engage with influential groups and individuals with criminal links.²⁴

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Methodology

All UNSC resolutions from 1 January 2000 to 31 December 2017 were analyzed for this study. The analysis was done according to these criteria:

- Date
- Country
- Region
- If the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) was referred to
- Any form(s) of organized crime discussed in the resolution

The 1 113 resolutions were coded within the time frame. Resolutions from before 2000 were not used in this study.



Mentions of organized crime were broken down by crime type. In many cases, resolutions would imply an incident of organized crime, such as human trafficking, but not explicitly label the incident as such. In recognition that these omissions are often the result of political influence and that the acknowledgement of crime carries significant implications, researchers made an informed judgement on whether to include certain incidents based on the wording in the resolution, and on its applicability to the 2017 UN definition of the crime type. For example, the recruitment and use of child soldiers is often not labelled as human trafficking in the resolutions, but it is labelled as such in this interactive tool. A detailed series of search terms was used to thoroughly scan each resolution (see the appendix at the end of the report).

UNSC resolutions often begin by referencing relevant past resolutions. Importantly, the content of the referenced resolutions was not included as part of the resolution under consideration. For example, if a resolution in 2017 referenced a resolution from 2005 that affirmed the UN's position on human rights, and the resolution from 2005 mentioned human trafficking, the mention of human trafficking was recorded in 2005, and not as part of the resolution in 2017. This was done to avoid duplication in the dataset.

There are limitations in the use of Security Council resolutions as a proxy for organized-crime trends and caveats that must be acknowledged before venturing into analysis. The content of these resolutions can be seen as not so much a measure of trends in conflict as trends that have come to prominent international attention. The trends that warrant such high-level concern may be skewed in favour of the political expediency of the powerful states that exercise more influence in the Security Council. In addition, bringing conflict dynamics and organized-crime trends to such international attention naturally relies on reporting and analytical capability within conflict zones. As noted above, analysts have repeatedly drawn attention to the analytical capacity of multilateral peace operations as being limited. However, keeping these limitations in mind, the resolutions still provide a wide-ranging base of evidence. However, when used in the context, as here, of debates over multilateral responses to conflict and instability, and to interrogate what types of organized crime feature high up on the Security Council's agenda, then the resolutions provide a valid frame of reference.

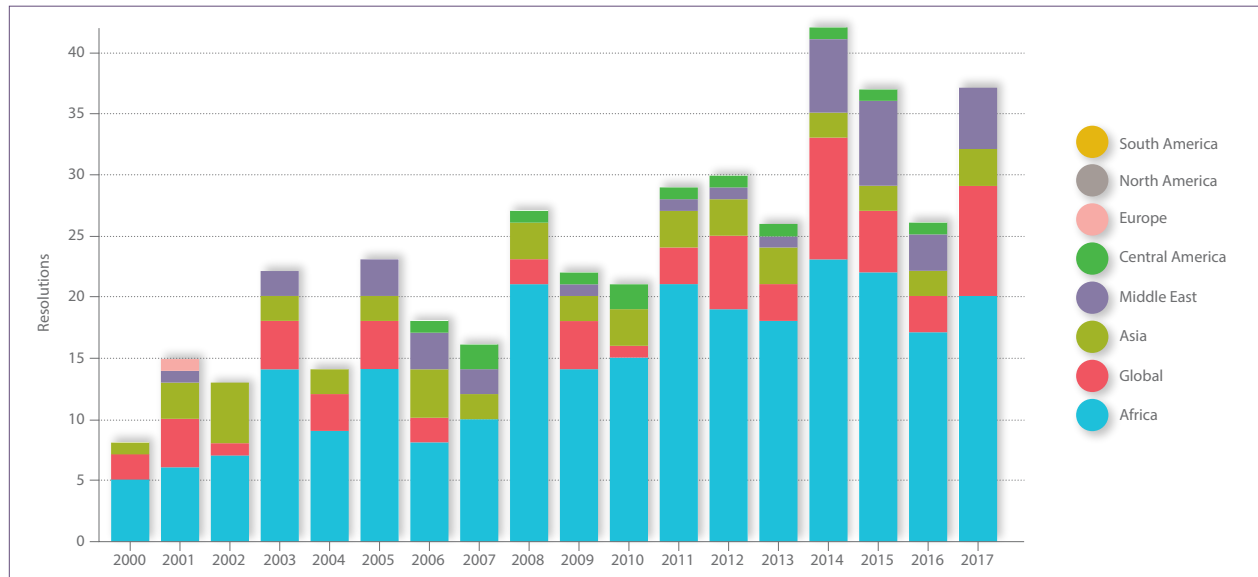
Key findings

High proportion of resolutions relating to organized crime, overall upward trajectory

The major finding of this analysis is the high proportion of resolutions referring to forms of organized crime and the clear upward trajectory over the study period. Of the 1 113 UNSC resolutions to be passed within the stated period, 35% mentioned forms of crime. In the period 2012 to 2017, more than 60% of resolutions have mandated a response to criminal flows and markets. This reached a peak in 2014 of 63.5% from the lowest point in the time frame (16.3% in 2000). This is a significant proportion, and one that is surprising perhaps even for those who have observed the impact of criminal flows on peace operations and advocated for organized crime to be placed higher on the security agenda. It is a remarkable development, but not one that seems to be universally well recognized or discussed. The figure starkly shows how organized crime is, now more than ever, an inextricable part of the global (in)security landscape.



Figure 1: Total number of resolutions making reference to at least one form of organized crime



A notable contrast may be made with Security Council's references to terrorism in its resolutions. Despite its comparative prominence in international discourse on peace and security, terrorism is only ever allocated a fraction of the mentions in Security Council resolutions that are given over to forms of organized crime. To take 2014, the peak year for organized crime, with mentions in 42 resolutions, mentions of terrorism occurred in less than half that number of resolutions, with just 20 mentions. This trend was replicated across the study period. While it must be noted that mentions of organized-criminal activity may be indirectly linked to the activities of terrorist groups, this finding is still significant given the relatively higher political weight attached to the fight against terrorism in international discourse.

Overwhelmingly, concerns about the threat posed by terrorism to international stability have elicited a strong response within the UN System, including the establishment of new instruments and bodies, additional capacity for analysis and information-gathering, and allocation of resources. The UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, first adopted in 2006 and reviewed every two years, is an instrument that guides international efforts on countering terrorism, maintains momentum on the issue and coordinates the response of international organizations.²⁵ In June 2017, the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism was established through a General Assembly resolution.²⁶ This moved the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force and the UN Counter-Terrorism Centre (previously housed within the Department of Political Affairs) into the new office, to provide strategic leadership and ensure counter-terrorism strategies are implemented across the wide scope of UN operations.

By contrast, no comparable changes have been made, or even proposed, to the international framework and institutions that are tasked with countering organized crime. The remarkable trend that can be seen of forms of organized crime rising higher on the security agenda seems not, as yet, to have translated into the kind of political impetus that is seen in the fight against terrorism. This may seem to be a counterintuitive or misguided approach

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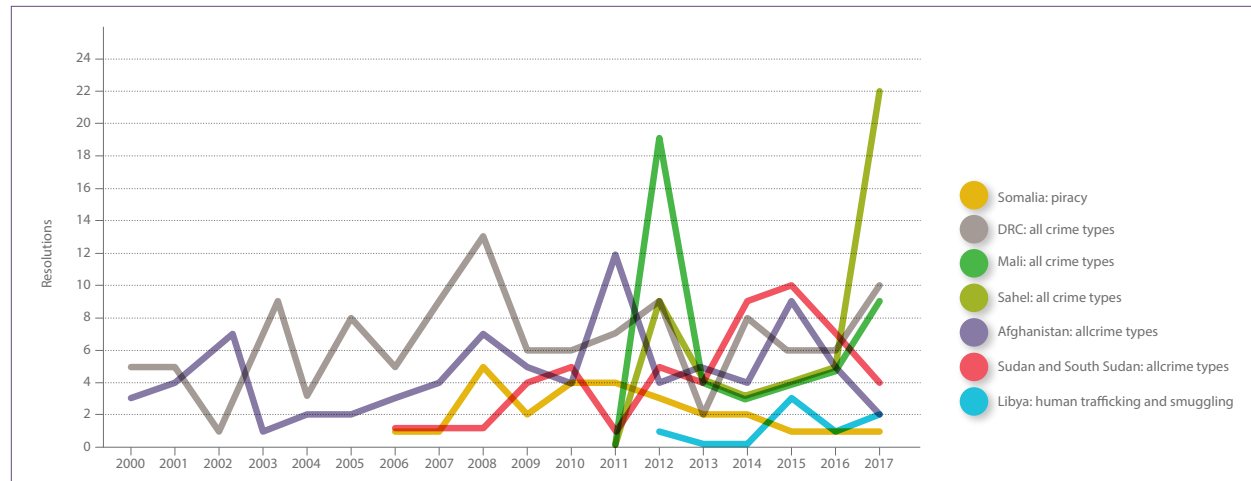


when, in quantitative terms, the relative financial and human cost of global terrorism and organized crime are considered. Estimates from the Institute of Economics and Peace placed the global financial cost of terrorism at over US\$52 billion in 2014.²⁷ By comparison, a conservative estimate from the UNODC placed the global cost of total transnational organized crime at US\$870 billion a year, equivalent to about 1.5% of global GDP.²⁸ Similarly, the number of recorded deaths that can be directly linked to terrorism worldwide was 328 in 2015;²⁹ by contrast, 256 500 individuals were killed as a result of criminal activity (including gang crime, but excluding domestic homicides) during the same period. Although not all of these would have been victims of organized crime, comparing these two figures does at least indicate the magnitude in the scale of organized crime-related deaths, and this number does not even include deaths (or injuries for that matter) that could have been caused by fraudulent, substandard or counterfeit goods.

Trends in organized crime around key conflict areas

Figure 2 provides a breakdown of the overall upward trend of organized crime discussed above, by illustrating the trends of organized crime – as mentioned in the resolutions – associated with several major conflict settings. In some instances, the trends reflect specific crime types most commonly associated with that conflict – namely Somali piracy, and human trafficking and smuggling in Libya. Other trends instead combine mentions of all major crime types in resolutions relating to a particular conflict. These few selected trends illustrate how, increasingly since the turn of the millennium, illegal markets have emerged as key dynamics in all major conflict settings and have become more diverse. Since illicit flows seem now to be an inherent and unavoidable part of modern conflict, a far more comprehensive and proactive response across the UN System is warranted.

Figure 2: Upward trend in organized crime in key conflict settings



Afghanistan represents a crucial landmark within this broader landscape of crime–conflict trends, as in many ways it was the first major conflict with ramifications for global security where a form of organized crime – namely drug trafficking – constituted a major and influential factor, outside of the directly conflict-linked proliferation of arms trafficking.³⁰ As can be seen from the visualization, organized crime has continued to be a major facet of continued conflict and instability. This has taken place across diverse forms: drug trafficking receives the most mentions (35 over the study period out of a total 43); this is followed by kidnappings, abductions and financial crime (each receiving 14 mentions). Arms trafficking, despite its intrinsic connection with conflict, receives only nine mentions by comparison. Human trafficking, additionally, comes to the Security Council’s attention in 2008 and is mentioned consistently through to 2012.



The data on Mali also provides a comprehensive example, demonstrating how mentions in Security Council resolutions reflect a diverse range of illicit economies that have emerged as key dynamics within the conflict. Since the outbreak of conflict related to insurgencies in the northern area of the country in early 2012, illicit flows have been a central part of the conflict economy. Human trafficking (eight mentions in total), drug and arms trafficking (five and eight mentions, respectively), and kidnapping/abductions (six mentions) have all been consistent and recurring themes in resolutions relating to the region. Control over smuggling routes and the financial gains from these illicit flows have been a source of violence and an advantage to insurgent groups from the outset. This reflects Mali's position as a fragile state, with porous borders to the north that allow the flow of contraband and people towards Europe, as the state has become a site of major trafficking routes.³¹

By contrast, the trends in specific crime types – human trafficking and smuggling in Libya (13 mentions total) and piracy in Somalia (27 mentions) – serve to illustrate how organized-crime trends are manifested very differently in each context, and how conflict and absence of effective institutions can lead to the emergence of particular criminal markets as key industries. In Libya, for example, criminal groups associated with human trafficking and smuggling capitalize on the country's position at the apex of migration routes.³² However, while these particular criminal markets may have become synonymous with the Libyan and Somali conflicts (90% of all mentions of piracy relate to Somalia), this is not to deny that, in these contexts of endemic violence and insecurity, a range of other illegal markets have emerged comparable to those noted in Mali and Afghanistan. Mentions in resolutions pertaining to Somalia, for example, also include kidnapping and abductions (11 mentions), arms trafficking (23), and financial crime (nine). Emerging markets in resource and wildlife trafficking are also noted here (three mentions each).

It is also notable that nearly two-thirds of all resolutions referencing a form of organized crime concerned a country or region in Africa (63.6%). This runs counter to general perceptions that the continent, while experiencing a number of complex and protracted conflict situations, is not a globally prominent region for 'organized crime'. However, recent analysis has indicated that criminal markets and violent criminal groups are steadily becoming more influential, as African countries are taking an increasingly prominent position in the global criminal economy.³³

Key trends by crime type

While the overall upward trend in the number of resolutions that mentioned all forms of organized crime over the study period strongly indicates its increasingly central role in global conflict and state fragility (as are the details of how this trend is manifested according to individual conflicts), the breakdown by crime type reveals additional key narratives about the make-up of the overall trend.

A significant factor to mention here is the upsurge in mentions of arms trafficking, observed consistently across the study period and reaching highs of 27 and 28 mentions in 2014 and 2015. It is perhaps unsurprising that arms trafficking is by far the most mentioned crime type, given its connection to conflict. However the significant upward trend suggests that there is more at stake than just the inherent relationship between arms and conflict, and instead it would suggest that illicit arms flows are increasingly coming to the Security Council's attention as an influential factor in contemporary conflicts. The mentions may reflect to some extent the growth of non-traditional forms of conflict, in which there is increased fragmentation and the predominance of non-state armed groups who provide the demand for illicitly acquired conventional weapons.



Figure 3: Total number of resolutions making reference to arms trafficking

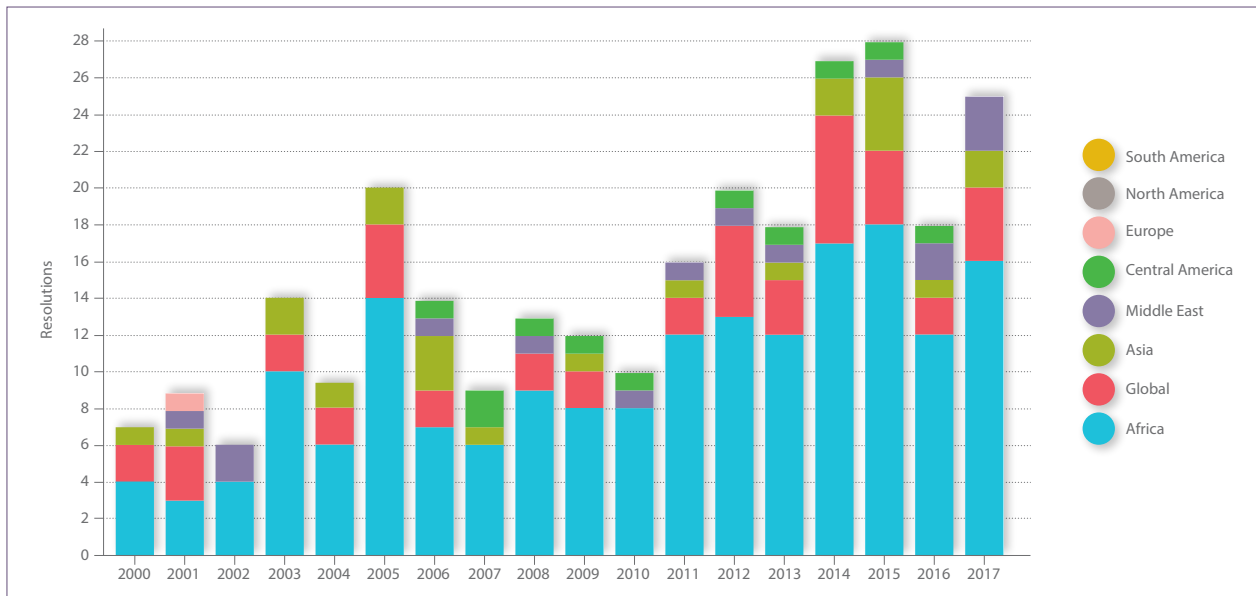


Figure 4: Total number of resolutions making reference to drug trafficking

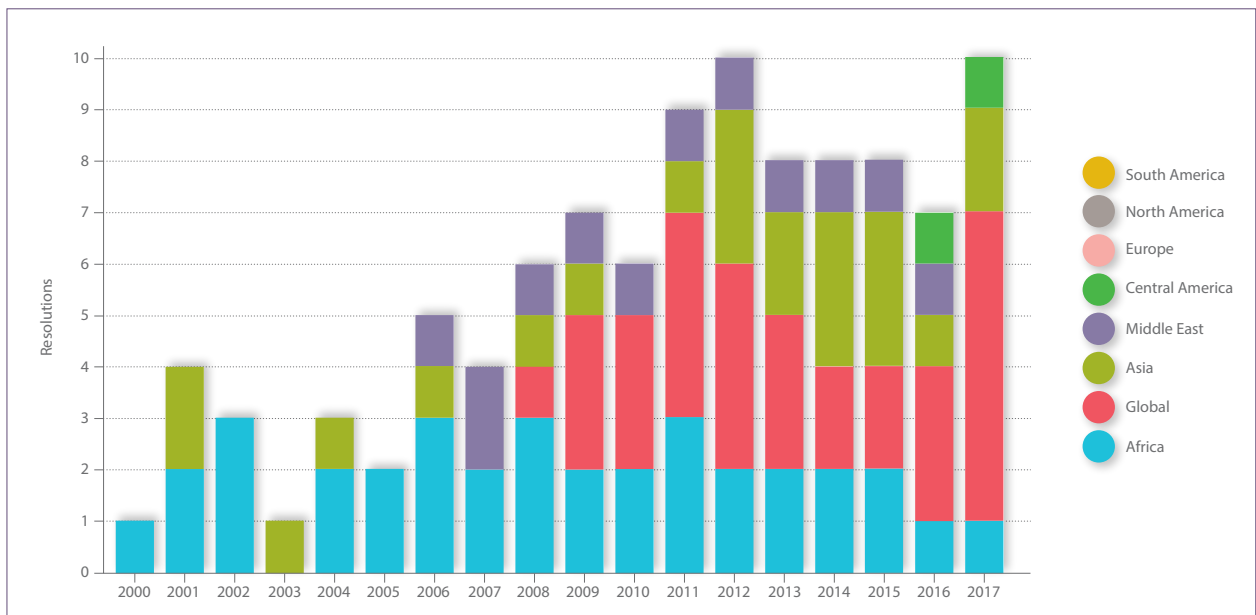
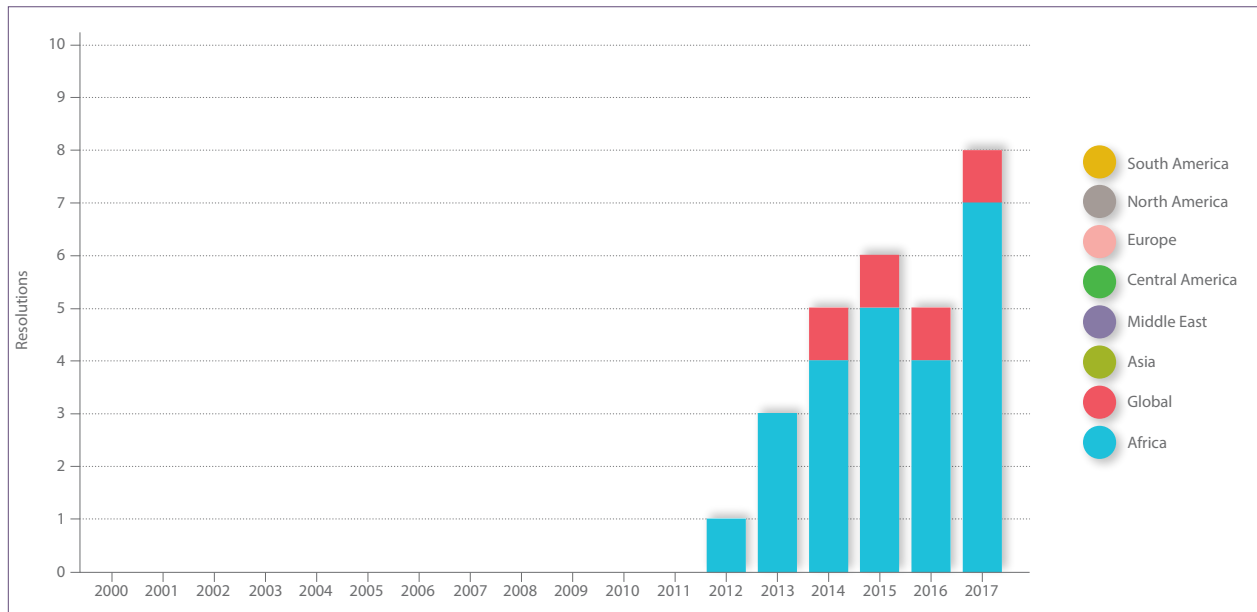


Figure 5: Total number of resolutions making reference to wildlife trafficking



However, the increase in these mentions also to some extent mirrors increased international attention to the issue of illicit arms and the sophisticated and extensive efforts to control the arms trade. The adoption of the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development in 2006 – which aims to address the setbacks that armed violence brings to development – and the Arms Trade Treaty in 2012 would surely have been influential in bringing illicit arms to the attention of the Security Council and member states. These new instruments supplement the existing international frameworks that address the arms trade, namely the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms, and the Firearms Protocol to the UN Convention on Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC), both adopted in 2001. Mentions of arms trafficking in Security Council resolutions may inform and spur on development of these more recent initiatives, given that such resolutions go into forming mandates and directing the work of UN agencies. Then again, the targeted lobbying and strategic guidance that such initiatives may provide also informs the priorities of bodies such as the Security Council. In using the resolutions as an indicator, then, it may be best to consider their content as the culmination of feedback between decision-makers and practitioners, both a reflection of international debate and a leading part of it.

Although the dramatic upsurge in conflict-related criminal markets has been documented, there has not been a comparable uptick in the international response to it.

The upward trend is by no means limited to mentions of arms trafficking but is seen across many forms of organized crime. Significant increases in number of mentions of crime types over the study period can be seen in markets as diverse as human trafficking, drug trafficking, financial crime and goods trafficking. Wildlife trafficking, in particular, can be seen as an ‘emerging’ form of conflict-related crime so far as the attention it has received from the Security Council would indicate. Since it was first mentioned only in 2012, wildlife-related crime has swiftly emerged as a major topic of resolutions, reaching a peak of eight individual mentions in 2017. The vast majority of these refer to African contexts, including the DRC and Central African Republic, reflecting the widely documented increase in incidents of ivory poaching, primarily serving the demand for ivory as a luxury good in Asian markets. Collectively, the parallel upward trends suggest that illicit conflict economies are progressively becoming more diverse.



However, although the dramatic upsurge in conflict-related criminal markets has been documented, there has not been a comparable uptick in the international response to it, as has been seen in the case of arms trafficking and terrorism, such as the establishment of major bodies, coordination across UN agencies, treaties or multilateral initiatives dedicated to the issue. One might perhaps expect to see a drive led by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) to raise a coordinated response to transnational organized crime on the international agenda, using UNTOC as the major international instrument for countering organized crime. Yet, across all 1 113 resolutions analyzed here, UNTOC was explicitly mentioned only 13 times (i.e. 1.2% of the total number of resolutions). While this might reflect shortcomings of the convention,³⁴ it also perhaps indicates fragmentation among the UN bodies with criminal-justice mandates, and a weakness on the part of the custodian of the convention, the UNODC, in failing to project its relevance effectively and push forward UNTOC on the agenda.

The scant use of the convention by the Security Council to provide a framework of response to organized crime threats is also illustrated in its three protocols, relating to firearms, trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants. Even though arms trafficking is by far the most mentioned type of crime mentioned in Security Council resolutions, the UNTOC firearms protocol has been mentioned only twice since its adoption. Similarly, the protocols on trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants have received only six and three mentions, respectively. Tellingly, the smuggling of migrants protocol was not referred to in resolutions concerning Libya until October 2015 (Resolution 2240), even though the migration crisis had been an ongoing reality there for over a year before that. According to data from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, there were over 70 000 sea arrivals in Italy in 2014, and over 3 000 deaths, primarily among migrants passing through Libya. Since most crossings are made during the summer months, the greater proportion of the 150 000-plus crossings and attempted crossings in 2015 would have been made before this resolution was passed.³⁵

Conclusions and recommendations

The data under analysis here makes it clear that, in recent years, the UNSC has increasingly and consistently come to acknowledge the importance of organized crime and an ever expanding range of illicit markets. Addressing forms of organized crime through resolutions recognizes the impact illicit markets may have on conflicts, and how the economic incentives to control key resources and smuggling hubs can shape the behaviour of criminal and conflict actors. The challenge lies in translating the powerful message of the collective resolutions into a cohesive and sustainable response. Crime-prevention strategies should increasingly be considered at all stages: from peace operations and planning, to response, recovery and rebuilding, as well as monitoring processes to assess efficiency and evaluate whether counter-crime mandates have been fulfilled.

Organized crime may not, as yet, have stimulated as much global impetus, political cachet or multilateral cooperation as other issues, such as the fight against terrorism, for a number of reasons. Firstly, although the dataset shows a significant increase in mentions of organized crime over several years, the pattern is a steady build-up, not triggered by a single cataclysmic event. Because of its gradual nature, the growing conspicuousness of organized crime on the Security Council radar may not have caught attention of international observers. In addition, organized crime as a concept is more inchoate and fragmented even than terrorism, encompassing an increasingly diverse set of activities that appear in different ways according to context. However, this analysis suggests that seeing the commonalities between different forms of organized crime and centring

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strategies on this concept could be a useful tool, aiding understanding of this increasingly central feature of modern conflict. Current analysis of the cautious, limited approach taken by peace operations in response to organized crime in recent years suggests that innovative thinking is needed to form a cohesive organized-crime strategy that is adaptable to new threats as they arise.

As described in a number of contexts, peace operations have in the past inadvertently contributed to criminal flows because of misguided interventions or indirect consequence of their presence and operations. This may be the result of mistakenly legitimizing criminal actors,³⁶ providing a market for illicit goods and services³⁷ or stimulating demand for trafficked goods.³⁸ As forms of organized crime increasingly become a major focus of UN resolutions, reflecting on-the-ground experience of the strategic importance of illicit flows in conflict, the ramifications of misguided interventions may exacerbate the problem.

Expanding the analytical capabilities of multilateral peace operations and providing intelligence-gathering task forces with sufficient resources is an essential first step in reducing the likelihood of peace operations inadvertently contributing to organized crime. This should include ongoing political economy analysis – which should include criminal markets and key actors and power holders operating within major trafficking routes, as well as the surrounding environment of these markets, and the social and political dynamics that are reliant on it.³⁹ This could follow the example seen in MONUSCO, with its dedicated Criminal Networks Task Force.⁴⁰ Mapping illicit flows and which groups control key resources and transport hubs, and the political or economic motives behind such actors, is an essential part of attempting to restore peace. As negotiations often aim to induce armed groups to relinquish control over such resources, gaining an understanding of the strategic importance of such resources could prevent instances where a vacuum of power has led to the strengthening of criminal actors. Of course, there are limitations on what information is available in volatile conflict situations, yet investing more consistently in sound analysis that acknowledges the political ramifications of curtailing illicit markets may allow peace operations to be more proactive.

In many of the major recent and ongoing conflicts in which forms of organized crime have emerged as politically strategic markets, control over key transport (and consequently trafficking) hubs and lootable resources and extraction sites has become a contested political advantage. Control over key ports in Libya through which human trafficking routes flow, access to gold mines in the Central African Republic and the abundant natural resources found in the DRC have been the source of confrontation and continued instability. In the interests of curtailing the prevalence of illicit markets in conflict settings, multilateral peace operations could move in the direction of providing international oversight of key resources and infrastructure points, to reduce risk of their capture by violent actors. This way, key resources could effectively be put into administration until the end of the conflict.

Similar recommendations have already been made by analysts regarding the nexus between organized crime and conflict. These have included calls for a ‘culture of analysis’ to be instigated in multilateral peace operations,⁴¹ boosting analytical capacities and improved mapping of illicit networks,⁴² a move towards ‘intelligence’ being used more effectively in informing the strategies behind peace operations,⁴³ and improved understanding of the political economy of criminal markets.⁴⁴ What is clear, however, is that these recommendations have not been acted on, nor is any international agency currently coordinating a drive to do so in the future.

To push forward the necessary changes to the UN System approach to organized crime, the creation of an instrument comparable to the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy must be considered. Such a strategy would encourage coordination across the disparate international agencies whose mandates touch on organized-crime issues and their interconnections with violent conflict, and push forward political engagement on the issue among member



states. The lack of engagement around the existing UNTOC convention, as evidenced through the resolutions and elsewhere, suggests that this kind of focal coordinating body is sorely needed. A global strategy could drive forward adaptable, proactive UN System responses to new conflict-based organized-crime threats as they arise, rather than approaching each illicit market as a separate entity. Since the resolutions show that an increasing diversity of forms of organized crime are becoming major factors in conflict, it is clear that there is a need for a comprehensive and adaptable strategy.



Appendix: Search terms for data collection

Crime type	Key search terms used	Example
Human trafficking	Trafficking, human, sale, sell, children, recruitment, trade, slavery, women	'trafficking of persons especially children' S/RES/2119 (2013)
Human smuggling	Flow(s), movement, border, smuggling, illicit	'illegal smuggling of migrants' S/RES/2380 (2017)
Drug trafficking	Drug(s), narcotics	'illegal drugs activities' S/RES/1333 (2000)
Arms trafficking	Arms, armed, transfer, flow, illicit, weapon, sale, traffick, trade	'illegal flow of small arms' S/RES/1318 (2000)
Resource trafficking	Resource, water, minerals, timber, wood, ivory, gold, oil, diamond, petrol, ivory	'the illegal exploitation of natural resources, illicit trade in such resources' S/RES/2117 (2013)
Wildlife trafficking	Wildlife, poach, fish	'the linkage between the illegal exploitation of natural resources, including poaching and illegal trafficking of wildlife, illicit trade in such resources' S/RES/2360 (2017)
Armed robbery / theft	Theft, robbery, steal	'to create the conditions for a durable eradication of piracy and armed robbery at sea off the coast of Somalia' S/RES/2299 (2016)
Piracy	Piracy, maritime	'undertaking measures to suppress acts of piracy' S/RES/2111 (2013)
Goods trafficking	Goods, artefacts, art, cultur(e/al)	'including from the trafficking of arms, persons, drugs, and artefacts, and from the illicit trade in natural resources, including gold and other precious metals and stones, minerals, wildlife, charcoal and oil, as well as from kidnapping for ransom and other crimes, including extortion and bank robbery' S/RES/2253 (2015)
Financial crime	Financial, financing, fund, money laundering, fraud	'to more effectively combat transnational organized crime, in particular drug trafficking and money laundering' S/RES/2103 (2013)
Cybercrime	Internet, online, cyber, tech, communications	'Expressing its concern over the use of various media, including the Internet, by Al-Qaida, Usama bin Laden, and the Taliban, and their associates, including for terrorist propaganda and inciting terrorist violence' S/RES/1617 (2005)



Crime type	Key search terms used	Example
Terrorism	Terror, armed groups, Al-Qaeda, Da(')esh	'the most serious threats to peace and security and that any acts of terrorism are criminal and unjustifiable regardless of their motivations' S/RES/1989 (2011)
Kidnapping	Kidnap(ping) , abduct(ion), hostage, ransom	'strongly condemning the incidents of kidnapping and hostage taking with the aim of raising funds or gaining political concessions' S/RES/2164 (2014)



Notes

- 1 Available at <http://globalinitiative.net/scresolutions/>. We encourage you to use our tool for analysis and visualization, and feel free to share it widely. You can also download the original source data. We do, however, appreciate a citation or acknowledgement, as the following: Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2018, Organized Crime and Illicit Flows at the Security Council, www.globalinitiative.net/SCResolutions.
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- 9 See Wibke Hansen, The organized crime–peace operations nexus, National Defense University, Center for Complex Operations, 2014, http://cco.ndu.edu/Portals/96/Documents/prism/prism_5-1/The_Organized_Crime_Peace_Operations_Nexus.pdf; Jäir van der Lijn, Multilateral peace operations and the challenges of organized crime, SIPRI, February 2018, <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2018/sipri-background-papers/multilateral-peace-operations-and-challenges-organized-crime>; and W Kemp, M Shaw and A Boutellis, The elephant in the room: How can peace operations deal with organized crime? International Peace Institute, 2013, <https://www.ipinst.org/2013/06/the-elephant-in-the-room-how-can-peace-operations-deal-with-organized-crime>.
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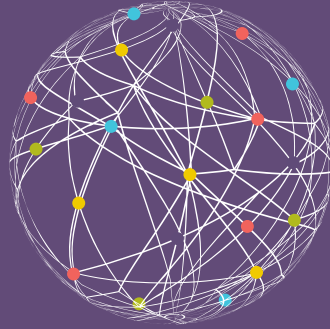


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- 38 See, for example, the well-documented increase in smuggling of Sierra Leonean diamonds through Liberia in response to export sanctions on Sierra Leone, a trafficking route created in response to multilateral action. (See Wibke Hansen, The organized crime–peace operations nexus, National Defense University, Center for Complex Operations, 2014, http://cco.ndu.edu/Portals/96/Documents/prism/prism_5-1/The_Organized_Crime_Peace_Operations_Nexus.pdf.)
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