

Organized Crime: A Challenge for UN Peacekeeping

Often hidden in the shadows, Transnational Organized Crime (TOC) is being slowly dragged into the light, as the international community begins to grasp its true power as a [potential peace spoiler](#) in post-conflict environments. However, despite constantly colliding with TOC in fragile post-war settings, the UN has so far failed to adopt a comprehensive and coherent strategy for combating transnational organized crime and its negative effects on peacebuilding. Without such a universal strategic framework, UN missions on the ground will be forced to continue their ventures into the darker side of peacebuilding without any institutional guidance. Allowing UN peacekeepers to autonomously deploy ad hoc and uncoordinated counter-measures can no longer suffice to contain the ever-growing threat that TOC poses.

1.1.1 Spoiling the peace

According to the UN, [Transnational Organized Crime](#) refers to a set of actors who seek financial benefit by committing acts considered to be criminal both nationally and internationally. These acts may include drug and human trafficking, kidnapping, and money laundering.

TOC thrives when state institutions are weakened or have completely collapsed during conflict, thus becoming more entrenched in the country's political economy. Regional organized crime networks take advantage of the power vacuums created during conflict to forge [local partnerships](#). Apart from recruiting members from the poor and disenfranchised sectors of the population, TOC also forges connections with political elites seeking to reap economic and political benefit from their involvement in illicit activities.

In fact, the [corruption](#) of political elites is crucial for TOC groups to continue their activities unhindered, thus avoiding criminal prosecution and undermining the state's authority. TOC may also seek to insert its partners into local government. This was the case in Kosovo where members of the Kosovo Liberation Army, involved in [drug and arms smuggling](#) during the conflict, were designated as policemen and even elected to public office afterwards. These, in turn, continued to exercise their roles in TOC, now using their political power and influence to facilitate or ensure state complicity with TOC activities.

1.1.2 Letting soldiers do police work

When the UN becomes an active player during or after a conflict, it seeks to achieve peace by returning the monopoly of violence and the rule of law into the hands of a capable centralized state, making any structural challenges to this project a potential threat to peace. Striving to maintain a status quo where the state is weak, TOC stands in stark opposition to peace-building, for it threatens the viability of establishing the rule of law. Consequently, UN missions, predominantly military in

nature, are often unqualified and ill-prepared to deal with the operational challenges posed by TOC. The usual resort to strictly force-based military tactics should give way to more investigative and intelligence-based police work. In this, the UN's experience in Kosovo can serve as a benchmark for designing future mandates and missions.

1.1.3 Setting the bar in kosovo

Kosovo was the first and, so far, only UN peace mission to clearly identify, prevent and disrupt organized crime. The fight against organized crime per se was not among the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo's (UNMIK) initial priorities. However, in 2002, it became one of the mission's main focuses with the creation of the [Kosovo Organized Crime Bureau](#) (KOCB). Primarily, the KOCB carried out actual investigations, allowing NATO troops to use the intelligence gathered to disrupt trafficking networks and arrest those involved. Moreover, it helped Kosovo's legislature pass applicable laws for the prosecution of actors participating in TOC, and sought to build the capacity of the Kosovo Police Service to carry out investigations. This was supplemented by the creation of the Office of Anticorruption in 2003, which investigated and set out to reform corrupt state institutions. Eventually, all these efforts were successfully integrated into Kosovo's Department of Organized Crime, thus creating the basis for a transfer of expertise and responsibilities from international to local authorities.

1.1.4 Lessons learned?

Haiti, a traditional transshipment hub for drugs coming from Colombia to the US, was also quickly flagged as a site where TOC could play a peace-spoiling role. However, unlike UNMIK, the United Nations Mission for the Stabilization of Haiti (MINUSTAH), established in 2004 did not create a specific police office focused on tackling TOC. MINUSTAH did, however, create an innovative set of tactics to tackle organized crime, more specifically the gangs operating in Haiti's urban slums. By using innovative human [intelligence-gathering tactics](#), MINUSTAH was able to use precise information to disrupt and arrest gang leaders. Nonetheless, these tactics continued to rely on military, rather than more in-depth police-led investigative and prosecutorial solutions. Despite [arresting hundreds of gang members](#) since 2007, MINUSTAH's aggressive military approach to clearing gangs from the slums has also led to [human rights violations](#) as many civilians have been caught in the crossfire. This has drastically lowered public support for MINUSTAH and the UN presence as a whole. Therefore, the UN's failure to transfer lessons learned in Kosovo to Haiti demonstrates the lack of a coherent and unified institutional framework specifically geared at helping peace missions combat TOC.

1.1.5 A unified strategy

By following the example of the UN Peacebuilding Commission, the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations should, together with the UN Office on Drugs and Crimes and INTERPOL, formulate a flexible, easily adaptable, and comprehensive cross-agency strategy to deal with the issue. This would include deploying peacekeeping missions with more investigative police units specialized in fighting organized crime, securing borders, quickly reforming the judicial system, and creating a federal police capable of combating corruption. Undoubtedly, the UN's

operational experience in Kosovo and Haiti can, and should, serve as a valuable starting-point for such developments. However, guaranteeing long-term peace will also demand a concerted focus on implementing social and economic programs that create disincentives for citizens and former fighters to participate in organized crime.

Sincerely,

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1.1.6 Resources

International and Governmental Organizations

[The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime \(UNODC\)](#)

Established in 1997 through a merger between the United Nations Drug Control Program and the Centre for International Crime Prevention, the UNODC works to assist Member States in their struggle against illicit drugs, crime and terrorism. In the Millennium Declaration, Member States also resolved to intensify efforts to fight transnational crime in all its dimensions, to redouble the efforts to implement the commitment to counter the world drug problem and to take concerted action against international terrorism.

[The United Nations Peacebuilding Commission \(UNPBC\)](#)

The Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) is an intergovernmental advisory body that supports peace efforts in countries emerging from conflict, and is a key addition to the capacity of the International Community in the broad peace agenda. The PBC's 2008 Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding in [Guinea-Bissau](#) identified transnational organized crime as a powerful threat to peace in the country and the greater West African region.

[INTERPOL](#)

INTERPOL has been a leader in combating transnational organized crime by creating a set of vital tools that national law enforcement agencies can and should use to better coordinate the global fight against TOC. INTERPOL has developed databases on International Intellectual Property crime, stolen and lost travel documents, DNA profiles, fingerprints, stolen vehicles and nominal information, all of which is accessible to national governments via I-24/7, its secure global police communications system.

Research and Academia

[International Peacekeeping](#)

This journal examines the theory and practice of peacekeeping and peace operations as instruments of policy at an international level. In February 2009 (Volume 16, No. 1), *International Peacekeeping* published a special issue devoted to analyzing the increasingly important nexus between peace operations (UN and non-UN-led) and transnational organized crime. The issue contains

contributions from leading experts in the field, such as James Cockayne, Phil Williams, and Peter Andreas.

[Geneva Centre for Security Policy \(GCSP\)](#)

GCSP is an international training centre, offering courses for civil servants, diplomats and military officers in security policy. GCSP organized, in November 2007, a groundbreaking seminar on peace operations and transnational organized crime. The seminar gathered scholars, policymakers and policy-shapers to discuss the threats of organized crime to fragile post-conflict peacebuilding efforts. As a result, GCSP issued a report on the seminar, outlining the main points and recommendations. The report can be found in the ISN's digital library: "[Peace Operations and Organised Crime](#)".

[Swisspeace](#)

As a practice-oriented peace research institute specializing in conflict analysis and peacebuilding, develops vital tools for conflict mitigation. In a thorough and engaging report, Swisspeace's Nika Stražišar Teran examined the relationship between peacekeeping operations and organized crime by focusing on two cases studies: Kosovo and Liberia. The report is also available on the ISN's digital library, under the title "[Peacebuilding and Organized Crime: The Cases of Kosovo and Liberia](#)".

Please also see our keywords on [Organized Crime](#), [Transnational Crime](#), [Peacekeeping Operations](#), and [Peacebuilding](#).