



PRESS RELEASE

SURGING TRANSNATIONAL CRIME ACROSS CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC LINKED TO RUSSIA, CHINA, RWANDA AND UAE

**Gold, Diamonds, Timber and ‘War Frenzy’ Drug Fuel Armed Conflict
Illicit Operations and Profits Linked to CAR Government, Russia’s Wagner Group and an Array of
Predatory Foreign Entities**

10 June 2026 (Bangui, Geneva) – A breaking investigative report by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC) reveals a major escalation of transnational organized crime in the Central African Republic (CAR), with links to Russia, China, Rwanda and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The ‘Malicious Markets’ report offers an in-depth study of the predatory trades and networks most responsible for armed violence and organized crime in the CAR, warning of accelerating flows of weapons, cryptocurrency, diamonds, gold, timber and products like the ‘war frenzy’ drug Tramadol.

The report contains never-before-reported revelations and implications for an expanding frontier of global crime. Notably, the report reveals how Russia’s mercenary force Wagner Group, despite sanctions and competition, has continued to thrive and deepen its criminal operations in partnership with the government in Bangui and has established a hub for wider criminal operations across Africa.

Ruben De Koning, senior expert at GI-TOC and report author said, *‘The trail of predatory operations leads directly to an array of foreign powers seeking profit and a platform to project power across Africa. Intersecting illicit markets and criminal networks, notably Russia’s Wagner Group, in corrupt alliances with the Touadéra government, have deepened their operations, channelling weapons and strategic material inwards and valuable commodities outwards to global markets. Today, the criminal economies fuel widening armed conflict, mass atrocities, regional destabilization and state capture by criminal networks.’*

Alongside the report, GI-TOC has produced a publicly available [interactive map](#) of mining activity and armed violence across the CAR. The detailed map spotlights conflict areas, locations of armed actors from rebels to government forces and mining activity hotspots.

Nathalia Dukhan, director of the Central Africa Observatory at GI-TOC and report author added, *‘High-ranking political and military figures, co-opted criminal actors and transnational organized crime groups have aligned to extract profits by consolidating control over key criminal markets. The past five years have seen criminal activity diversify, integrate and escalate across the most lucrative economic sectors and resource types, unchecked by law enforcement and further activated by the CAR presidential circle and its foreign partners.’*

GI-TOC’s investigative team produced the report by deploying leading-edge open-source intelligence techniques, monitoring social media channels used by illicit actors, reviewing public and private data on trade flows and mining permits and analyzing satellite imagery to confirm movements and activity. Findings were bolstered by an extensive literature review that included United Nations (UN) Panel of Expert reports on the

CAR, reporting from international organizations and accredited journals and the GI-TOC's own body of research on organized crime in the region.

Selected report excerpts:

- Today, instruments of war – arms, fuel and tramadol (an analgesic used by combatants for its stimulant and endurance effects) – enter the CAR from neighbouring countries, whether through licit or illicit channels, but their origins lie in global supply hubs. These commodities traverse complex transnational networks and logistics hubs that link international suppliers with local conflict actors. While criminal markets are increasingly organized in hierarchical and coercive systems – with the presidency and the ever-enduring Wagner Group at the centre – non-state armed groups continue to exploit smuggling routes, diverting flows to maintain territorial influence, control key resources and generate profits.
- Through the illegal transfer of military cargo aircraft – used to transport arms and mercenaries – the CAR has functioned as a key logistics hub for Wagner Group operations across the continent, a role that persists to support Russian Africa Corps deployment in West Africa.
- Markets for laundering gold, diamonds, timber, wildlife, cattle and illicit finance link conflict zones to global economies. Resources extracted under state-aligned control, and to a lesser extent by rebel groups, are traded and trafficked through regional and international hubs, where their origins are concealed and their revenues recycled. Transnational networks finance, transport and commercialize these commodities, while control over strategic sites and trade routes drives intense violence. These sectors are both sources of revenue and arenas of geopolitical contestation, where coercion enforces access, maintains monopolies and sustains criminalized governance structures.
- A system of criminalized governance has emerged in which coercion, regulation and extraction are fused into a single apparatus. Access to resources and revenue streams is mediated by political alignment, and loyalty is rewarded with participation in illicit economies. Violence functions as a tool of market control, used to secure territory, discipline competitors and regulate access.
- Revenue flows – largely bypassing the public treasury – have reached unprecedented levels, coinciding with growing transnational organized crime and the increasing instrumentalization of state institutions. Foreign security and commercial partners – including Wagner-linked Russian networks, as well as actors connected to Rwanda, China and the United Arab Emirates – operate within and reinforce these transnational criminal ecosystems. Russian networks siphon hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of gold from the country each year, smuggling it abroad or laundering it through a UAE-linked front company. The CAR has consequently become one of Russia's most lucrative footholds in Africa.

Read the full 'Malicious Markets' report: <https://centralafrica.globalinitiative.net/conflict-and-crime/publications/mapping-the-violent-criminal-ecosystem-in-the-central-african-republic>

Access the interactive map: maps.globalinitiative.net/central-african-republic/mining-and-violence-mapping

MEDIA REQUESTS: *Experts from the investigative team are available for interview and comment. Please contact newsroom@globalinitiative.net*

ABOUT THE GI-TOC

The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime is a network of professionals working on the front lines of the fight against the illicit economy and criminal actors. Through a network of global civil society observatories on the illicit economy, we monitor evolving trends and work to build the evidence basis for policy action, disseminate the expertise of our Network, and catalyze multisectoral and holistic responses across a range of crime types. With the Global Initiative's Resilience Fund, we support community activists and local non-governmental organizations working in areas where crime governance critically undermines people's safety, security and life chances.