

Soldiers walk near the wreckage of a crashed Antonov 32 aircraft on 26 May 2008 in Goma, Democratic Republic of the Congo (Lionel Healing/AFP/Getty Images)

AIR TRANSPORT AND DESTABILIZING COMMODITY FLOWS

HUGH GRIFFITHS AND MARK BROMLEY

Air transportation has played a key role in fuelling the war economies that have devastated much of Africa in recent decades. It is instrumental in the transfer of small arms and light weapons (SALW) as well as in the extraction and transfer of precious minerals, metals and hydrocarbons. Air transportation actors are also important facilitators of illicit flows of illegal narcotics and tobacco destined for European, North American and Middle Eastern markets. At the same time, those air cargo carriers that have been reportedly involved in these commodity flows that have been so destabilizing are also enmeshed in humanitarian aid, peace support, stability operations and defence logistics supply chains of United Nations agencies, European Union (EU) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member states and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Transportation represents the 'choke point' for destabilizing or illicit commodity flows. Air and maritime transport actors are far easier to trace than arms brokers, drug cartels or resource smugglers as the former must legitimately register their aircraft, vessels and associated companies. As such, transporters are the only non-state actors involved in destabilizing or illicit commodity flows required to operate overtly. This characteristic makes

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Workers load a water processing unit from the German Red Cross (Deutsche Rote Kreuz) on to a DC-10 aircraft en route to Zimbabwe, at Schoenefeld Airport on 17 December 2008 following reports of a cholera outbreak (John MacDougall/AFP/Getty Images)

them possible to track via databases, flight and maritime records and field research and subject to control. The EU, through its institutions, legislation, member states and European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) is uniquely placed to influence the behaviour of these actors.

Unlike the global arms trade, UN mechanisms and standards to regulate aviation and maritime transportation are already in place and are increasingly enforced by supranational organizations such as the EU. Existing EU air safety mechanisms have already effectively targeted a wide range of companies named as involved in SALW flows by banning them from EU airspace. Such companies are thus prevented from accessing the world's largest regulated market.

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As the world's largest humanitarian aid and development donor, EU institutions, member states, NGOs and other partners can reinforce these 'market denial' trends by adding ethical transportation clauses to humanitarian aid, peace support, stability operations and defence logistics supply chain contracts. These clauses can preclude involvement with air transport actors associated with destabilizing or illicit flows.

ESDP missions in Africa and Eastern Europe can effectively support evolving EU information-sharing efforts through the insertion of pre-departure and in-country training modules and related components that sensitize civilian and military ESDP personnel to non-governmental air and maritime transportation issues. Such measures combined with Internet-based platforms and databases may also be used to address a lack of awareness and information coordination regarding air cargo companies within the humanitarian aid, peacekeeping and defence contractor communities in order to reduce UN agency, NGO or commercial usage.



Soldiers guard a 3.3 tonnes pure cocaine seizure after a Gulfstream II aircraft from Colombia crashed on 23 September 2007 in the Merida jungle in Yucatan State, southern Mexico (Hector Osnaya/AFP/Getty Images)

The application of relatively inexpensive yet empirically proven open-source, data-centred project models combined with field research can also provide EU and member state policymakers with the type of coordinated information systems necessary to systematically monitor air transport actors engaged in destabilizing or illicit commodity flows in Africa, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, South America and Central Asia.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The EU and member states should deny humanitarian aid, peace support, stability operations and defence logistics supply chain contracts to air transport companies engaged in destabilizing or illicit commodity flows, in particular the transfer of SALW.
2. The EU should support the efforts of African partners to improve air safety through the provision of ‘dual-use’ transport development capacity—building projects that specifically target unsafe air cargo companies engaged in destabilizing commodity flows.
3. ESDP mission planning and operational structures should take into account the key role of air transport companies in many ESDP mission areas and provide the requisite sensitization, awareness and reporting training.
4. The EU’s air safety mechanism should be refined and resourced to take account of the evasion techniques used by unsafe air cargo companies seeking to access EU markets.

Air transport is instrumental in the transfer of SALW as well as in the extraction and transfer of precious minerals, metals and hydrocarbons

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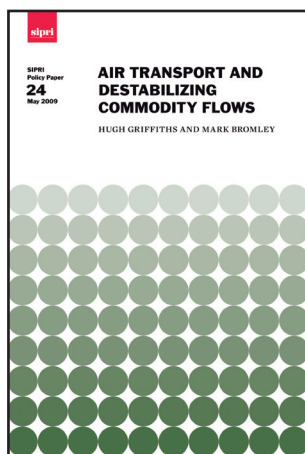
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SIPRI POLICY PAPER NO. 24

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Published by SIPRI

May 2009

ISBN 978-91-85114-60-3

63 pp.

Download from <[http://books.sipri.org/
product_info?c_product_id=379#](http://books.sipri.org/product_info?c_product_id=379#)>

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The Policy Paper summarized here is part of an on-going study by the Countering Illicit Trafficking–Mechanism Assessment Project (CIT-MAP) at SIPRI. CIT-MAP takes a multidisciplinary approach to the problem of destabilizing or illicit arms transfers. The project draws on investigative field research and empirical analysis which are synthesized in solution-oriented reports.

Further information on CIT-MAP, including its first publication, 'Stemming destabilizing arms transfers: the impact of European Union air safety bans', SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security no. 3, Hugh Griffiths and Mark Bromley, Oct. 2008, is available at <[http://www.sipri.org/contents/
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