

Mapping new configurations and geographies of military, security and policing power with the “war” on poaching

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Listed as the fourth most lucrative transnational organised crime after drugs, guns, and human trafficking, wildlife trafficking is garnering significant attention and resources from military, security, and law enforcement sectors. This has materialised in what some, including the US, refer to as the “war” on poaching. This so-called “war” has manifested in an array of western-led interventions to disrupt illicit wildlife economies from supporting in-country and transnational law enforcement and policing efforts, developing local and global intelligence networks, US and UK military involvement in anti-poaching and related training in Africa and Asia, and mainstreaming efforts to combat wildlife trafficking in official development assistance. What has catalysed western powers’ new found interest in wildlife trafficking is its multiple entanglements with the War on Drugs, the War on Terror, and other transnational security concerns. Indeed, commercial poaching and illicit wildlife economies are putatively linked to terrorism and insurgencies in what is known as “threat finance,” and overlap with other forms of transnational organised crime, including drug trafficking. Hence, much like these other liberal “wars”, the “war” on poaching is enabled by a coming together of humanitarian-like (saving biodiversity) and security imperatives. Combining ethnographic data with quantitative and spatial analyses, I detail the novel configurations and geographies of global military, security and policing power that wildlife trafficking and its integration into regional and global security politics is producing. I conclude by asking whether this biodiversity-security nexus provides an emerging dynamic through which we might map the evolving contours of liberal empire.