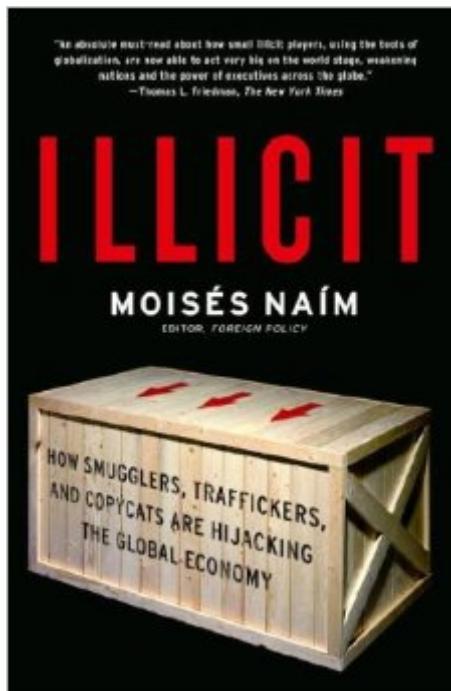


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Illicit: How Smugglers, Traffickers, And Copycats Are Hijacking The Global Economy



Synopsis

A groundbreaking investigation of how illicit commerce is changing the world by transforming economies, reshaping politics, and capturing governments. In this fascinating and comprehensive examination of the underside of globalization, Moises Naím illuminates the struggle between traffickers and the hamstrung bureaucracies trying to control them. From illegal migrants to drugs to weapons to laundered money to counterfeit goods, the black market produces enormous profits that are reinvested to create new businesses, enable terrorists, and even to take over governments. Naím reveals the inner workings of these amazingly efficient international organizations and shows why it is so hard and so necessary to contain them. Riveting and deeply informed, *Illicit* will change how you see the world around you.

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Customer Reviews

Illicit bursts with detail and example, though it contains very little in the way of illustrative anecdotes. The author seems mainly concerned with communicating two main points. First, our conceptions about the nature and organizational structure of international trafficking networks has fallen dangerously out of date. Second, operating assumptions and ideological sacred cows prevent governments from framing the problem of illicit trafficking in a way that will allow for constructive action. Concerning the first point, the "cartel and kingpin" conception of narco-trafficking formed and propagated in the 80's no longer applies. Our present counter-narcotics strategies assume that the enemy organization has a hierarchical structure with information and power flowing up and down a

chain of command. In fact, trafficking organizations these days take the form of decentralized networks which shift continuously, assuming new configurations as opportunities present themselves and then morphing again to meet the needs of the next moment. Also, today's traffickers don't specialize in a single commodity like cocaine. Instead, they move whatever goods present an opportunity for profit in the present moment; drugs today, arms tomorrow, people the next day and then knock-off designer handbags after that. Only the small players at the beginning and end of the supply chain specialize in particular products, e.g. the Bolivian coca farmer and the illegal immigrant selling bootlegged DVDs or knock-off Rolexes on the streets of New York. The author's second point concerns two ideological sacred cows. First, he warns against the politically entrenched practice of talking about illicit traffic in strictly moral terms.

I have known Moises Naim for many years, and admired his pragmatic approach to managing the content of Foreign Policy, as published under the auspices of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. He has been Minister of Trade and Industry in Venezuela, a dean and professor of business administration, executive director of the World Bank, and an accomplished thinker and author. Above all he has been moral. He gets it: morality in politics and morality in business are priceless. This book is important in two very big ways: the first, the one that most are noticing, is that it documents very ably the fact that crime pays--the author has done a superb job of itemizing the global illegal trade industry in a manner that could be understood by anyone, and the bottom line is frightening in that illicit trade is perhaps \$2 trillion a year, while legal trade is between \$5 trillion and \$10 trillion. Off-the-books bartering and immoral invoicing within corporations are additional reducers of government tax revenue--import export tax fraud in the USA is known to be \$50 billion a year (\$25 rocket engines going out, \$10 pencils coming in). The second reason this book is important, the real value of this book, is in documenting the revenues lost to government. Legalizing prostitution has economic as well as public health implications. Reducing the arms trade, where the US is the greatest exporter of violence and bribery, has implications across ethnic conflict, stability, water and oil conservations, and so on. Eliminating counterfeiting and illegal immigration would have enormous implications for positive constructive government revenue.

"Illicit" provides an interesting (but sometimes repetitive) summary of the various genre of illicit trade, difficulties in prosecuting such activities and how they sometimes conflict with government decision-making, but little in the way of data that allows one to put the topic into perspective - eg. what percentage of total trade is illicit, and how is that changing over time? (Steel's review provides

some data, but no details as to its origin.) Naim states that illicit trade in developing nations and those leaving communism is often the most powerful vested interest - in some cases more powerful than government. Raising barriers simply increases profit rates and incentives. Arms Trade: A. Q. Khan, national hero in Pakistan, has provided nuclear technology to other nations (presumably for primarily economic, rather than ideologic reasons), surplus arms released from Cold War downsizing, arms manufacturers seeking to replace former markets and unguarded Iraq arsenals have all served to increase supply. As for deterrence, Naim points out that the U.S. (under Bush II) sidetracked a U.N. conference on illicit trade in small arms/light weapons on the grounds that such would violate its Constitution. Drugs: Naim reports that research has led to new forms of cocaine resistant to herbicides and increased plant size, while violence and bribes are endemic in the industry. Counterfeiting of software, drugs, music, consumer goods, parts, etc. represents 5-10% of GDP, per Naim.

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