

How Artisanal Gold Mining Affects Global Security and What Can Be Done

Artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM) occurs in emerging market countries. Often working in dangerous conditions, artisanal miners use hand tools – think panning for gold. A whole family might work together. Small-scale miners are a bit more organized and have some equipment, but still operate simply. ASGM workers are outside of any legal framework.



A Burmese woman pans for gold in a small steam Putao, Myanmar.
Source: Silence is Gold: A Report on the Exploitation of Artisanal Gold Miners to Fund War, Terrorism, and Organized Crime

Per the World Gold Council, ASGM produces approximately 20% of gold's mining supply.
An estimated 80% of the total global gold mining workforce,
or approximately 20 million people, are subsistence miners.

Bad actors are attracted to ASGM because of its informality, gold's high value, and the miners' lack of access to a legitimate outlet to sell their gold. Mercenaries, money launderers, sex traffickers, criminal gangs, officials on the take, and others exploit miners who have no other option to earn a living.



Source: Silence is Gold: A Report on the Exploitation of Artisanal Gold Miners to Fund War, Terrorism, and Organized Crime

Someone once said, 'The answer to all your questions is money."
That rings true here. Criminals amass tremendous profits.

In November 2024, the former Deputy Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, the Rt. Hon Dominic Raab, penned an important report. In *Silence is Golden: A Report on the Exploitation of Artisanal Gold Miners to Fund War, Terrorism and Organised Crime*, we learn bad actors funnel illegal mining profits to finance activities around the globe that directly impact geopolitics and our security.

The Wagner Group controls mining in the Central African Republic. The Russian state-funded private militia has earned $2.5 billion since the outbreak of Ukraine war by providing 'security' to the artisanal miners. Separately, groups linked to the Islamic State (ISIL) and al Qaeda are keen profit from ASGM in other African countries.

Not all ASGM news is negative. An editorial in the 111th Alchemist called Learning from Small-Scale Gold Miners in Colombia describe community-based, ethical, and sustainable mining.

Nonetheless, there is work to do. Raab says the criminal stranglehold on artisanal and small-scale miners must be dismantled. "Governments, international organizations and the gold sector must work together to prosecute criminals, prevent illicit profiteering and integrate responsible ASGM into the legal and viable supply chain," said Rt. Hon Dominic Raab. "It will now require coordinated and sustained international attention and action to prevent the illicit flows from gold from bankrolling the war in Ukraine and enabling Al Qaeda and Islamic State to regroup in Africa."



A Man Hauling Rocks from a Small-Scale Gold Mining Tunnel in Compostela Valley, the Philippines.
Source: Silence is Gold: A Report on the Exploitation of Artisanal Gold Miners to Fund War, Terrorism, and Organized Crime

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Hopefully, the Raab report will spur progress to legitimize the occupation of ASGM and allow workers to rise out of poverty. Improved conditions and prices near the actual market would be game changers. Ignoring this crisis is no longer an option.

The **report** can be found on the website of World Gold Council, which partnered with Mr. Raab.

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