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COCAINE TRAFFICKING THROUGH WEST AFRICA:
THE HYBRIDIZED ILLICIT NETWORK AS AN EMERGING
TRANSNATIONAL THREAT

by

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Biography

Lieutenant Colonel Michael D. Reiner is a student at the Air War College, Maxwell AFB, Alabama. He recently completed a 365-day deployment to Baghdad, Iraq, where he served as Deputy Director, Protection, on the Multi-National Force – Iraq staff. He managed the largest antiterrorism program in US Central Command, with oversight of over 60 installations and 250 antiterrorism officers. He previously commanded USAF Security Forces squadrons at Hurlburt Field, Florida, Schriever AFB, Colorado, and Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio. He deployed to Colombia in support of Operation SUPPORT JUSTICE IV in 1993.

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Introduction

Traditionally, the primary cocaine trafficking routes from South America started at coca farms and laboratories in Colombia, traversed Mexico and the Caribbean, and ended with dealers and users in the US. In the last decade, a significant shift has occurred, with increasing amounts of cocaine travelling through West Africa to Europe. This shift developed in response to increased cocaine demand in Europe, successful interdiction of traditional trafficking routes in the Western Hemisphere, and weak governance in West Africa. However, the significance of this shift in narco-trafficking patterns goes far beyond opening a new front in the “War on Drugs.” The hybridization of profit-motivated transnational organized criminal groups with ideologically-driven international terrorist networks threatens to accelerate the destabilization of the nations of West Africa while generating significant funding for terrorist groups.

This paper will explore the implications of the West African drug trade as an example of the broader phenomena of the emergence of hybridized illicit networks. The Department of State’s Director for Anticrime Programs, David Luna, describes six key trends among transnational organized criminal groups: “(1) increasingly global in reach, (2) involved in multiple forms of criminal activity, (3) expanding their criminal markets to include large-scale financial fraud and cyber-crime, (4) willing to protect their illicit activities through violent and ruthless means, (5) linked to international terrorist groups; and (6) devising novel organizational strategies to deter capture.”¹ The development of successful strategies to disrupt West African drug traffic has broader application in the effort to dismantle other destabilizing transnational illicit trade networks (for example, human trafficking, money laundering and weapons smuggling). To illustrate this dangerous new phenomenon, the paper will describe the changes in narco-trafficking patterns, explore the causes of these changes, assess the implications, and

recommend actions. Combating hybridized transnational networks will require a multilateral approach, with extensive cooperation between the US and other global and regional actors.

Changes in Cocaine Trafficking Patterns

In 1999, the United Nations (UN) reported the US was the world's primary consumer of cocaine and Colombia was the dominant producer and distributor of the drug. The US Drug Enforcement Administration estimated 60 percent of the cocaine entered the US via overland trafficking routes through Mexico. The Caribbean was a secondary trade route of growing importance, with aircraft being used most frequently, but boats carrying the greatest volume. At this time, European cocaine consumption was notably lower than that of the US, but was described as the world's fastest growing market. Cocaine consumed in Europe was primarily being trafficked from Argentina, Brazil and Venezuela through Western and Southern Africa.²

The first major international recognition of a change in cocaine trafficking patterns came in 2007 when the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) published a report highlighting a surge in cocaine traffic in West Africa. The report noted that cocaine seizures in West Africa, which had never exceeded 268 kilograms in any year prior to 2003, suddenly rose to 1,323 kilograms in 2005, then to 3,161 kilograms in 2006 and to 6,458 kilograms in 2007. In addition, European law enforcement agencies interdicted significant amounts of cocaine coming out of Africa: 3,700 kilograms in 2005, 9,852 kilograms in 2006, and 4,950 kilograms in 2007.³ UNODC Executive Director Antonio Maria Costa concluded that these large drug seizures were "probably just the tip of the cocaine iceberg."⁴ This assessment appears accurate; the UNODC statistics do not include what is reportedly the largest single drug seizure ever made in Africa. In June 2006, the Nigerian Drug and Law Enforcement Agency announced the confiscation of 14,200 kilograms of cocaine from Peru, with an estimated street value of 385 million US dollars.

The drugs were discovered among bags of cement on a container ship docked in Lagos. When the drugs were destroyed in July, the weight of the seizure was updated to 16,300 kilograms.⁵

In November 2008, the UNODC published another report stating: “West Africa, which never had a drugs problem in the past, has become a hub for cocaine trafficking.”⁶ The UNODC 2009 Annual Report “confirmed” this major shift in drug trafficking routes through West Africa.⁷ However, these reports glossed over a long history of drug trafficking in the region, albeit at a lower level than the last few years. Documented cases of heroin and marijuana smuggling, primarily through Nigeria, can be found as early as 1952.⁸ In 1996, the US Department of State’s annual International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INSCR), labeled Nigeria as “the focal point of West African narcotics trafficking.”⁹ Nigeria was the only African state among the world’s 28 “major drug producing and drug transit countries” identified by the State Department in 1998.¹⁰

A more accurate characterization of the shift in drug trafficking patterns in West Africa depicts a steady gradual increase in both the throughput of illegal drugs and the number of countries involved during the last 10 years with a significant spike in the last 4 years. The Honorable William Wechsler, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, Office of Counternarcotics and Global Threats, described this change to the traditional routes: “Narcotics trafficking in West Africa is not a new phenomenon, but the unprecedented growth in trafficking since 2005 demonstrates that West Africa is now firmly tied into international trafficking patterns and is being systematically targeted by international drug trafficking organizations, principally from South America.”¹¹ During the decade from 1998 to 2008, the annual INSCR reports highlighted increasing levels of drug trafficking among other West African countries. Nigerian traffickers gradually spread the trade across their porous western border to Benin, then to Togo and Ghana.

The most dramatic expansion of the West African drug trade was the sudden emergence of Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, and Sierra Leone as major transit points for South American cocaine during the last 4 years.¹² In 2006, the US Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) reported Colombian cocaine cartels had established ties with African criminal organizations in Ghana, Nigeria, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Senegal, and Togo.¹³ By 2009, the DEA recognized at least nine major Mexican and South American drug trafficking organizations operating in West Africa.¹⁴ Expert testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in June 2009 estimated 400 to 500 metric tons of cocaine would transit from Latin America to Europe in 2009, with Africa described as “the center of gravity” for the movement.¹⁵

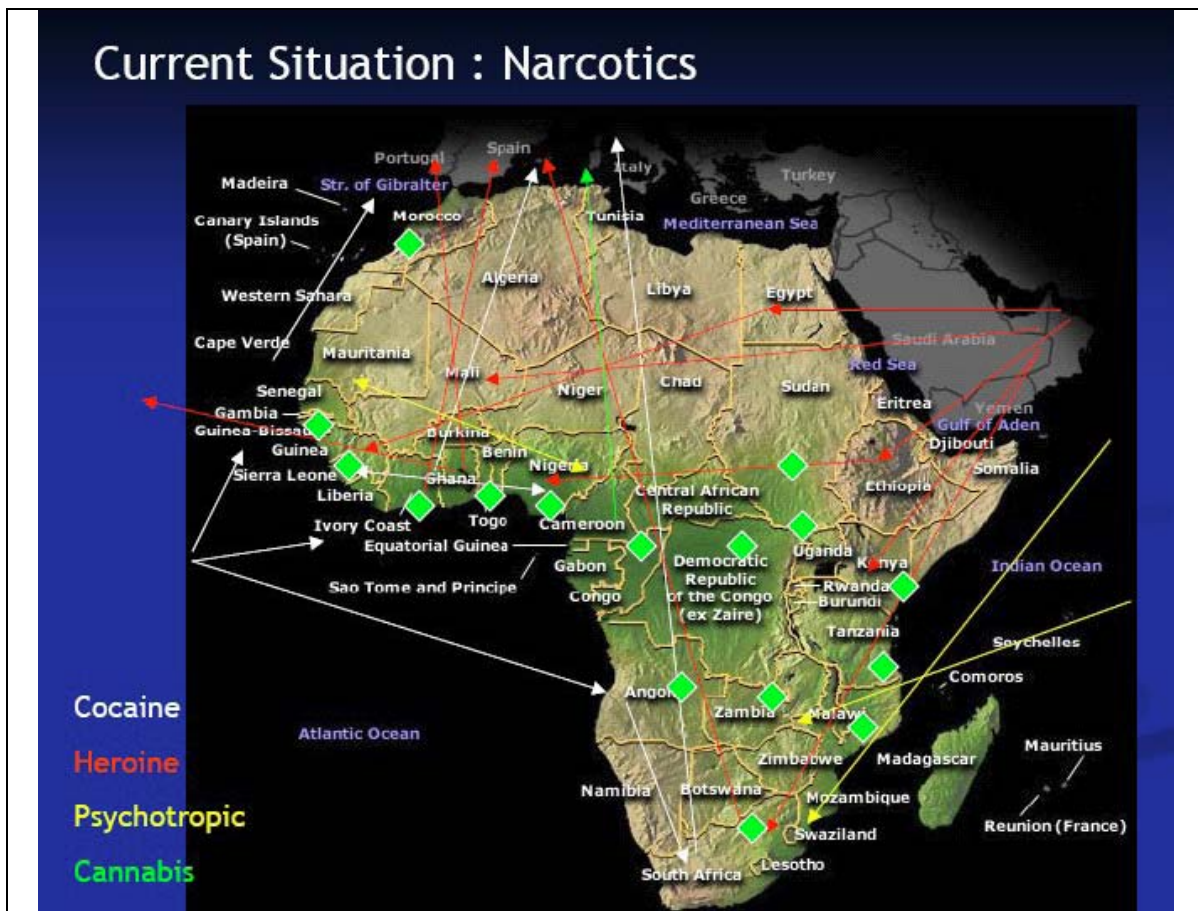


Figure 1: Current Situation: Narcotics.
 Reprinted from Mazzitelli, *Challenges*, 3.

The country most commonly cited as an example of the flourishing cocaine trade in West Africa is the tiny coastal nation of Guinea-Bissau. Described as Africa's first "narco-state," the government of Guinea-Bissau allegedly hosts Colombian and Venezuelan traffickers and uses their military bases and personnel to receive, store, and distribute cocaine shipments.¹⁶ Colombian cartel employees arrived in the country in 2004 to facilitate transfers of cocaine under the guise of fish or cashew export businesses. Today, the Colombians live extravagantly in lavish villas with armed security guards. Local police and judges claim the government and the military receive bribes to protect the drug traffickers from prosecution. The expensive mansions recently constructed by senior government officials appear to support these allegations.¹⁷

Reasons for Changes

The confluence of three major dynamics produced the shift in cocaine trafficking patterns to West Africa. First, the increased consumption of cocaine and the rising wholesale price of the drug made the European market more lucrative than the US market. Second, increasingly successful interdiction of traditional trafficking routes in the Western Hemisphere added to the costs of trafficking to the US. Finally, the weak and corrupt governments in West Africa provided traffickers with distribution points that were geographically favorable for traffic to Europe while posing few obstacles to illegal activity.

The first key driver of the increased flow of cocaine through West Africa is the growing demand for the drug in Europe. The DEA reported a 60 percent increase in Western European cocaine consumption in just 6 years: from 97 metric tons in 1998 to 153 metric tons in 2004. Because of the heightened demand, approximately 80 percent of the cocaine destined for non-US markets in 2005 was trafficked to Europe.¹⁸ An indication of the rapid progression of cocaine use in Europe can be found in the annual reports of the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs

and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA). In the late 1990's, EMCDDA reports described cocaine use in Europe as "rare" and estimated only 1 to 3 percent of adults aged 15 to 64 years had ever used the drug.¹⁹ In November 2006, the EMCDDA estimated 10 million Europeans had used cocaine at least once in their lives.²⁰ By November 2008, the estimate jumped to 12 million (3.6 percent of European adults), including 2 million adults who had used cocaine within the previous month.²¹ A majority of European cocaine consumption occurs in three countries: the United Kingdom (26 percent), Spain (24 percent), and Italy (22 percent) account for 72 percent of cocaine use in Europe from January 2006 to May 2008.²²

An economic factor intrinsically linked to increased cocaine demand in Europe is increased profitability due to the strength of the Euro against the US dollar and the rising wholesale price of cocaine in Europe. As European demand escalated, the wholesale price of cocaine also rose significantly in Europe relative to the US. According to UNODC data, the wholesale price of a kilogram of cocaine in Europe in 2000 was about 39,000 US dollars, compared to about 31,000 US dollars in the US. By 2007, the price in Europe had climbed to about 58,000 US dollars, while the price in the US remained unchanged.²³ The profitability of the European market will sustain West African cocaine trafficking as an integral link in the hybridized illicit network

The second major factor is the growing success of drug interdiction in the Western Hemisphere. This interdiction includes seizures of drugs within the primary coca production countries of Colombia, Bolivia and Peru, as well as interception of drug shipments on trafficking routes through Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean. UNODC data shows cocaine seizures in the Americas doubled, from approximately 306 metric tons in 1996 to over 640 metric tons in 2005.²⁴

The greatest increases in cocaine interdiction in the Western Hemisphere occurred in South America. In the world's largest cocaine producing country, Colombia, cocaine seizures skyrocketed from 41 metric tons in 1996 to 228 metric tons in 2005.²⁵ Much of this success can be attributed to increased commitment by the Colombian government and US financial and technical support through Plan Colombia. Since 2000, the US provided over 6 billion US dollars to the Colombian government, primarily to strengthen its military and police forces.²⁶ The Colombian government also has extradited over 700 drug traffickers to the US.²⁷ The threat of extradition adds pressure on Colombian cartels to shift trafficking operations away from the US.

The US also made significant progress in the Caribbean through extensive interdiction efforts. Twenty years ago, 50 percent of the cocaine entering the US was trafficked through the Caribbean; today the share of cocaine routed through the Caribbean has been trimmed to only 10 percent.²⁸ In 2008, US Southern Command's Joint Interagency Task Force – South (JIATF-S) seized over 228 metric tons of cocaine with an estimated wholesale value of 458 billion US dollars.²⁹

As increased interdiction in the Western Hemisphere drove cocaine dealers to develop routes to access the profitable European market, geography suggested Africa as a logical transit site for maritime or aerial traffic. However, more than simply geographic convenience, the third major factor that brought cocaine trafficking to West Africa is weak governance. A former senior DEA agent testified to Congress: “Most countries in West Africa simply do not possess the judicial, border, military and intelligence institutions and infrastructure necessary to deal with the threat posed by the Latin American and Mexican drug cartels, not to mention terrorist organizations and indigenous criminal groups that operate freely throughout this region.”³⁰ Governments in the region lack basic aerial and maritime intelligence, surveillance, interdiction,

and inspection capabilities. Their law enforcement, border enforcement, and judicial systems are weak or non-existent. Combined with rampant government corruption, these factors produced a haven for illicit trade.

Police in West Africa generally lack the equipment, training, and numbers to effectively combat the sophisticated methods employed by the South American cartels. Aerial deliveries land on small runways away from populated areas or drop sealed packets of cocaine in the ocean near the coast. Ships smuggle the drugs directly into ports inside shipping containers of legitimate cargo or carry the drugs openly to a point off the coast, and then transfer the packets to a fleet of smaller boats to transfer the drugs to the shore.³¹ Interdiction efforts are severely hampered by a lack of radars to detect the movements and vehicles to intercept them. For example, Guinea-Bissau has over 200 miles of coastline, over 80 coastal islands, and at least seven unpaved runways scattered across the country. Yet they have no radar, no aircraft, no police radios, and only two patrol boats and four police cars.³²

When law enforcement officials are able to intercept drug shipments and make arrests, intervention by corrupt government and military officials sometimes nullifies the seizures and allows the traffickers to go free. In Guinea-Bissau, police seized 635 kilograms of cocaine in a vehicle and arrested two military bodyguards of a senior Army officer who were travelling in the convoy. Although police destroyed the drugs, the men were released by the military without charges. In the face of pervasive corruption, judges feel powerless to enforce the law; Judge André Lima explains: "The military has impunity and we have no protection."³³

The people of West Africa are especially vulnerable to corruption due to extreme poverty.³⁴ Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Togo, Guinea, and Gambia rank among the 40 poorest countries in the world. Each has a per capita gross domestic product (GDP) below 1,500

US dollars. Even the most prosperous West African nation, Nigeria, ranks 178th, with a per capita GDP of only 2,300 US dollars.³⁵ The judicial police in Guinea-Bissau only earn 65 US dollars each month and often will not receive paychecks for months at a time.³⁶ Traffickers pay local employees and offer bribes in the form of cocaine that can be resold for more money than most government employees could legitimately earn in a lifetime.³⁷

Implications of New Routes

The expansion of cocaine trafficking routes into West Africa creates two primary dynamics with implications for US and international security interests. First, the explosive growth of narcotrafficking in West Africa poses a grave threat to the stability and legitimacy of the already-fragile governments in the region. Bribes to government officials continue the widespread pattern of corruption. The introduction of crack cocaine to the West African populace has also ignited a new addiction that will exacerbate the economic shortfalls in the region. The degenerative cycle of poverty, famine, and social disorder in these failed states creates a ripe environment for the recruitment of disenfranchised young people by extremist groups. The second dynamic is more ominous in the long term—the hybridization of profit-motivated criminal groups with ideologically-driven terrorist networks. The enormous profits available through illegal drug markets provide terrorist groups with a lucrative source of untraceable cash. Additionally, the transportation networks of the drug cartels can clandestinely transfer personnel, weapons and supplies across international borders for terrorist organizations.

The first dynamic, erosion of government stability and legitimacy, is not a new problem for this region; the governments of most of the countries in West Africa were already feeble before the growth in drug trafficking. Civil wars, military coups, and various insurgencies have been the norm for the region in the post-colonial era. Predictably, the vast financial resources of

the Colombian drug cartels quickly overwhelmed most of the West African governments. Former US Attorney General Mukasey described the impact of “iron triangles” on weak governments: “Corrupt business leaders, corrupt government officials, and organized criminals can work together to exert crippling influence over governments that can eventually lead to the criminalization of the state, or in instances where the criminal and terrorist activity are inseparable from the governance of the state. In the eyes of the people, this unholy trinity spirals downward to create an illegitimate state.”³⁸

The strongest example of the crumbling legitimacy of the government can be observed in Guinea-Bissau. Since gaining independence from Portugal in 1974, the country has experienced several military coups and insurgencies, a few free elections, and a bloody civil war.³⁹ Today, the central government exercises almost no legitimate control, particularly in the coastal region. Narcotraffickers, with support from the military, essentially govern the southern coastal provinces of Guinara, Tombali and Bolama.⁴⁰ The political instability of Guinea-Bissau culminated in March 2009 when President Joao Bernardo Nino Vieira and the Chief of Defense Staff, General Batista Tagme Na Wai, were assassinated. Although the identities and motives behind these killings remain unknown, they are widely believed to be linked to a power struggle between political leaders seeking to reform the rampant corruption and senior military officers supported by drug traffickers.⁴¹

The criminal justice system in Guinea-Bissau has proven powerless to constrain the violent intimidation that the drug traffic brought to the country. Police, judges and magistrates receive small salaries that provide little incentive to resist the pressure from drug traffickers. The country lacks a prison for convicted offenders. Arrestees are usually incarcerated in local police holding cells with inadequate security. After the President was assassinated, soldiers forcibly

released the prisoners from a police jail, underscoring the lack of accountability of the country's military and the impotence of the criminal justice system.⁴²

Political illegitimacy and instability also contribute to the continued economic woes in West Africa. In Guinea-Bissau, a country whose primary sources of legitimate income are cashew nuts and fish, the GDP was only about \$900 million US dollars in 2008.⁴³ When the entire nation's annual GDP can be equaled by the profit from a few large illegal drug shipments, the tremendous impact of the drug money can be clearly understood. About 6 grams of cocaine is worth as much as the average citizen's annual income.⁴⁴ Victor Cole-Showers of the Nigerian Drug and Law Enforcement Agency cites six ways that drug trafficking undermine economic development: "Loss of productive population; corruption; disincentive to foreign investment drive; money laundering; inflation; and destroying legitimate business." He warned that although the drug traffic infused the local economy with large amounts of money, it is a "false economic boom" because the money is concentrated in the hands of a few elites and not integrated into the local economy. Money laundering is relatively simple in West Africa because of the large informal economic sector which only uses cash. Legitimate businessmen are unable to compete against the influx of illegal drug profits.⁴⁵

A related phenomenon that further undermines the stability of Guinea-Bissau is the sudden emergence of drug abuse among the populace. In an area with almost no previous exposure to narcotics, the introduction of cocaine (and particularly crack cocaine) produced a growing population of drug addicts. Although the size of the problem is difficult to quantify due to the limited availability of historical data, UNODC concludes that the problem has grown significantly since the arrival of the Colombian cartels in 2004. Part of the problem stems from the practice of drug traffickers paying bribes and wages to their African associates using cocaine

rather than cash.⁴⁶ Crack cocaine addiction removes potentially productive laborers, mostly males aged 16 to 45 years, from the workforce. It has also driven an apparent increase in prostitution and AIDS in the region. The lost work productivity and crumbling social order further undermines any efforts to build economic stability.⁴⁷

Although Guinea-Bissau is the most prominent example of the negative impact of cocaine trafficking on legitimacy and stability, the problem is not confined to this country. Most of the other countries of West Africa, including Ghana, Senegal, Nigeria, Cape Verde, Guinea, Togo, Benin, Sierra Leone, the Ivory Coast and Liberia have also seen recent increases in the cocaine trade.⁴⁸ The UN Security Council voiced deep concern over “the threat posed by drug and human trafficking, which can undermine the important gains made with respect to rule of law, democratic and transparent governance. The Council further notes that the danger posed by drug trafficking in Guinea-Bissau could have negative implications towards the region, as well as other regions.”⁴⁹

The second dynamic, the growing nexus between drug trafficking and terrorism, has grave implications for global security. The capabilities to generate large quantities of cash and to discretely transfer personnel and materials have established transnational drug trafficking organizations as attractive business associates for international terrorist organizations. Their intricate illicit trafficking networks facilitate covert movements of money, weapons, equipment and personnel across international borders. The high profit margin of cocaine sales has become a significant source of funding for terrorist groups: DEA assesses that 19 of 44 groups that the US government has designated as Foreign Terrorist Organizations profit from the illegal drug trade.⁵⁰ Similarly, in a 2004 Canadian government study, 13 of 40 international respondents

reported that terrorist organizations in their countries cooperated with organized criminal groups, primarily in the areas of logistics and financing.⁵¹

Two recent examples highlight cooperative activity in West Africa. In November 2009, a Boeing 727 crashed in Mali after delivering up to 10 tons of cocaine from Venezuela. The Department of Homeland Security claims the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) has modified several aircraft with additional fuel tanks to allow non-stop trans-Atlantic flights and the DEA has seized six aircraft in West Africa ferrying cocaine from Venezuela.⁵² In December 2009, the DEA arrested three Malian men who claimed membership in the North African Islamic extremist group, al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). In negotiations with undercover DEA agents posing as FARC drug dealers, the men agreed to use AQIM convoys to smuggle large quantities of cocaine across the Sahel and into Spain for a fee of 7,000 Euros per kilogram.⁵³

Several terrorism researchers ascribe the increasing convergence between transnational organized criminal organizations and terrorist groups to the decline in state-sponsored funding for terror since the end of the Cold War. Driven by a need for alternative funding sources, groups with seemingly incompatible ideologies come together for mutually beneficial arrangements. Transnational criminal groups can provide expertise in areas such as money laundering, covert transportation, and high-profit illicit sales; terrorist groups can furnish weapons, explosives and training. Globalization enhances the opportunity for cooperation as improvements in international transportation and communication ease the coordination and execution of complex transactions.⁵⁴

Recommendations

The US and the international community share a common interest in addressing the threats posed by cocaine trafficking through West Africa. The UN acknowledges this threat to the political, social and economic stability of the region. The European Union (EU) confronts a growing drug abuse challenge similar to the influx of cocaine to the US in the 1980s and 1990s. Finally, the fragile governments of West Africa face an existential threat to their legitimate rule of law. A solution to this complex transnational problem should involve all of these actors in a cooperative multidimensional effort that minimizes stove-piped fragmentation based on geographic, functional or political boundaries.

West African governments lack the capacity to curtail illicit traffic without substantial outside assistance. Long-term success will only be possible through the establishment of stable governments with the capability to enforce rule of law, provide basic internal security, implement effective maritime interdiction and border enforcement, and reduce rampant internal governmental corruption. Systemic poverty in West Africa must also be addressed as an underlying condition that incentivizes illegal trafficking and government corruption as a means of financial survival. Cole-Showers stressed this point: “As long as the issue of poverty is not addressed, I assure you, you will always be having the problem of trafficking.”⁵⁵ Building stable governments and stimulating economic recovery will require sustained multilateral commitments from organizations such as the UN, EU, African Union, World Bank and Economic Community of West African States.

To move toward these extremely challenging goals, near-term actions should focus on interdicting illicit traffic and building organic enforcement capability. European and US agencies will lead interdiction efforts, with West African governments supporting when able.

They will also train and equip West African police and military forces to eventually assume full responsibility for the rule of law within their nations. As the primary customer of cocaine trafficked through Africa, Europe arguably has the greatest interest to lead this effort. The EU Council describes Europe as “the world's major donor in the struggle for sustainable solutions to the global drug problem.”⁵⁶ The EU has invested 57 million Euros (about 84 million US dollars) in 72 programs to counter drug trafficking in West Africa and recently affirmed “that drug trafficking, especially using the West and Central Africa route for storage and transit, but also for processing, trading and/or production, should be an EU priority in the fight against organized crime for 2009/2010.”⁵⁷

The key to successful interdiction will be intelligence sharing and collaborative law enforcement actions conducted by international partners with the consent of local West African governments. Working together, these groups can decrease the cocaine flow by interdicting drug shipments during transit while simultaneously attacking the flow of money from the drug trade. In 2007, the United Kingdom, Portugal, Ireland, France, Italy, Spain and the Netherlands opened the Maritime Analysis and Operations Center – Narcotics (MAOC-N) in Lisbon. The organization “will use warships and narcotics officers from each member state to intercept shipments before they reach EU soil” and includes civilian law enforcement and military personnel. Europol and the US will observe and share expertise with the mission.⁵⁸ In 2008, an intelligence fusion organization, Anti-Drug Coordination Center - Mediterranean, opened in Toulon, France, to exchange intelligence on drug trafficking and coordinate interdiction efforts.⁵⁹

The US can leverage its experience and technological superiority to provide actionable intelligence for European and African enforcement efforts. JIATF-S has excelled in tracking and coordinating international interdiction efforts in the Western Hemisphere and now coordinates

with MAOC-N to hand off tracking of suspicious air and sea vessels transiting from South America to Africa.⁶⁰ The US also conducts interdiction efforts on the African continent. As the lead US federal drug law enforcement agency, the DEA is actively engaged in the region. Two of the four DEA field offices in Africa are in West African nations (Nigeria and Ghana). Working with local police, DEA successfully interdicted several major cocaine shipments and extradited key Colombian drug traffickers to the US.⁶¹

The US can also contribute significantly through training and equipping. The DEA strategic plan for West Africa emphasizes law enforcement training, offering classes such as “Drug Unit Commanders,” “Airport Interdiction,” and “Clandestine Laboratory Operations” in 2009.⁶² Similarly, the US Federal Law Enforcement Training Center established an International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA) in Gaborone, Botswana, in 2000. This program provides valuable training opportunities for African police, with classes sponsored by the DEA, FBI, and US Department of State Bureau of International Narcotics & Law Enforcement Affairs. Police from Ghana, Guinea, Nigeria, Senegal and Sierra Leone attended ILEA training in 2009.⁶³

Increased police training will require financial support. The international community should invest in the future of the region by paying to send more police to ILEA or to bring more mobile training teams to the region. With the cooperation of host nation governments, programs such as those used in Iraq to rebuild the national police force could be implemented. The Civilian Police Assistance Training Team managed by Multi-National Security Transition Command – Iraq and the International Police Liaison Officer (IPLO) contract managed by Department of State trained thousands of Iraqi police officers.⁶⁴ A similar program could improve police professionalism and capability, but should not rely on US military police due to the ongoing employment of these forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. The use of contracted civilian

law enforcement personnel, such as the IPLO program, is an option, but requires strict oversight to prevent abuses. A multilateral approach involving primarily European civilian police would spread the financial burden and emphasize the role of civilian police in the rule of law.

The US Department of Defense will also play a role as Africa Command seeks to build the security capabilities of African militaries through training and equipping. However, the solution should not involve a significant “boots on the ground” presence on the African continent. A good example of the proper role of the US military is the Africa Partnership Station. US Navy forces partner with civilian and non-governmental agencies to improve the capability of the navies of African coastal nations to provide maritime security of their territorial waters and ports. Since November 2007, US Navy crews have trained several thousand local military personnel in the Gulf of Guinea. Sailors from Benin, Cameroon, Gabon, Ghana, Nigeria and Togo learned ship boarding and search and seizure tactics in 2009.⁶⁵ This type of military training mission improves short-term interdiction by providing a persistent US naval presence in the Gulf of Guinea, but more importantly will pay long-term dividends as inept and corrupt local navies develop into professional and competent forces.

Conclusion

South American drug cartels have shifted cocaine trafficking routes through West Africa to Europe in response to increased cocaine demand in Europe, successful interdiction of traditional trafficking routes in the Western Hemisphere, and weak governance in West Africa. The illicit trade threatens the legitimacy and stability of governments in West Africa. More importantly, the cooperation of profit-motivated transnational organized criminal groups with ideologically-driven international terrorist networks exemplifies the emergence of the hybridized illicit network as a transnational threat. Long-term success will require the establishment of

stable West African governments able to enforce their borders and maintain internal order. In the near term, mitigating this threat will require a multilateral approach involving regional and international partners, with the EU in the lead. Aggressive interdiction efforts can reduce the amount of illegal drugs trafficked through the region and deincestivize drug trafficking as a funding source for terrorist groups. The US will play an important role in combating this transnational threat through direct interdiction, intelligence support, and training West African police and military forces.

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End Notes

(All notes appear in shortened form. For full details, see the appropriate entry in the bibliography.)

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