

## **Testimony Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee**

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Chairman Feingold, Senator Isakson, and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding the threat of drug trafficking in West Africa.

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. While the direct threat to the U.S. is limited, this trafficking problem endangers peace, development, stability and democracy in West Africa and poses an increasing threat to both our African and European partners.

In accordance with NSPD 50, the national security goals for Africa include building capacity, consolidating democratic transition, bolstering fragile states, strengthening regional security and providing humanitarian and developmental assistance. The Department of Defense strategy for achieving these goals include reducing threats that

flow from ungoverned areas of weak and fragile states, countering humanitarian tragedies that often arise from conflict, ethnic tensions and extreme poverty, working with our partners to build capacity and reduce threats by promoting reform and professionalism in African militaries, and by fostering stability and assisting in reconstruction.

Together with regional organizations such as the Economic Community of West African States and partner countries such as Senegal and Ghana we have worked to raise regional peacekeeping capabilities.

The recent explosive growth in narcotics trafficking in West Africa seriously impacts our strategy and goals. We have seen how drug traffickers on other continents work to corrupt politicians, militaries and the judicial process. They are using the same tactics in Africa. West Africa has made great progress since the horrendous civil wars at the turn of this century. The corruption and violence associated with the drug trade can rapidly undermine the progress made in the region. What we see as vulnerabilities in Africa the traffickers see as opportunities. Drug related corruption and violence will undermine overall U.S. regional strategy and weaken African militaries unless the traffickers can be convinced now, while they are still establishing their networks, that West Africa, and the rest of the continent is not open for their business.

Four years ago, only 10 percent of the cocaine destined for the European market first transited West Africa, but by 2007 we saw this estimate climb to nearly 60 percent, representing 180 to 240 metric tons and 18 percent of the total world cocaine production. In 2008, this fell to approximately 40 percent of the cocaine destined for Europe, likely due to the instability in Guinea and Guinea Bissau, two of the regions primary entry points. In 2009 this figure is expected to climb again, as the drug trafficking organizations adjust their operations around the political realities of the region.

Drug traffickers have intensified their use of Africa as a transshipment point as a reaction to increased interdiction efforts against direct shipment to Europe and to take advantage of Africa's porous borders, instability, corruption, and lack of law enforcement. Once on the continent, the drugs are broken down into smaller quantities for further shipment using various means and routes. Often, traffickers will put as many as 30 couriers on a single commercial flight from places like Accra, Ghana to the European Union, and will then give the name of one courier to the authorities on the receiving end to focus law enforcement on that individual, allowing the remainder to proceed unchecked.

West African organized crime groups receive large amount of cash or up to one third of the drug shipment as payment for services. This in turn leads to the serious corruption issues with certain West African Governments and is contributing to a growing drug use

problem. The amount of money officials are paid in bribes far exceed what these impoverished governments can pay in salaries, and can lead to what is called a narco state, defined as an area that has been taken over and is controlled and corrupted by drug cartels and where law enforcement is effectively nonexistent. Recent events in Guinea Bissau leave their current status unknown. For example, a UN Report states that in 2006, 674 kilograms of cocaine was taken off a plane that landed at a military airstrip. Military officers took control of the drugs, which subsequently disappeared. The two Colombian suspects that were arrested were later released by a judge, with no legal reason given. As government capabilities decline due to rampant corruption, licit activity becomes more difficult and discourages foreign investment. Also, there is a large population of young people in this region. Without any real avenues for licit employment or opportunity, they can become a humanitarian burden through illegal immigration to Europe or America or become vulnerable to extremist ideology and become part of a terrorist organization. Finally, left unchecked regional instability can deteriorate into armed conflict necessitating expensive Non Combat Evacuations of American Citizens or the deployment of peacekeepers to the region to stave off wide spread humanitarian crisis.

Regional government capacity to address the problem is varied, but in general is weak to nonexistent. Certain countries like Cape Verde, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Ghana have either a limited basic capability to conduct independent counter narcotics

operations or have demonstrated their political will through participation in maritime law enforcement operations with the United States.

DOD's Counternarcotics Strategy, which guides counternarcotics operations and assistance at all Combatant Commands, calls for building host nation capacity to conduct counternarcotics operations through "enhancement of interdiction forces." To build a regional capability, aid in terms of training and equipment for the navies and coast guards must be tailored to the individual countries while keeping in mind the broader regional capacities we seek to build or enhance. For successful maritime operations to occur, our international partners need assets to patrol against and interdict drug trafficking organizations, including land vehicles, patrol boats, and aircraft, along with the requisite training and funding stream for maintenance and operations. However, it must be noted that basic government, law enforcement and military institutions must be in place before substantial investment in hardware will be beneficial, and that the funds available to these governments both internally and in terms of foreign assistance are very limited. AFRICOM CN efforts recognize this reality and focus on the basic capabilities these governments need. The interagency is currently working to develop a strategy that balances interdiction and other counternarcotics efforts. DOD is collaborating closely with our interagency colleagues to ensure the resulting strategy appropriately addresses narco-trafficking in the African

context, including taking into consideration the assistance our European partners are providing.

AFRICOM CNT analysts are actively collaborating with their counterparts at Joint Interagency Task force South (JIATF-S), our European partners' Maritime Analysis and Operations Center (MAOC) based in Lisbon, the U.S. Office of Naval Intelligence, Defense Intelligence agency, and others to monitor the drug flow, support the broader efforts, build capacity, and help guide which projects will have the greatest impact against drug trafficking organizations. AFRICOM CNT provides assistance to both military and law enforcement units with counternarcotics missions. The maritime projects already underway in West Africa include:

- AFRICOM CNT sponsorship of students from multiple West African nations on Africa Partnership Station to attend courses taught by US Coast Guard Trainers.
- Construction of a pier and refueling facility to extend the range of the Senegalese Navy.
- Supported the establishment of Cape Verde Maritime Security Interagency Operations Center, which is an interagency fusion center that will help to develop the regional intelligence picture and communications with US organizations like JIATF-S and the MAOC in Lisbon.

- Construction of a climate controlled facility at the international airport at Accra, Ghana to screen passengers suspected of swallowing drugs.
- Collaborating with 6th Fleet to construct a boat facility in Ghana to support Defender Class boats that were provided by the US.
- Supporting the training of the future Liberia Coast Guard Commander and Deputy Commander at the International Maritime Officer's Course at the USCG training facility in Yorktown, VA

Some of the aforementioned programs are the result of direct AFRICOM interaction with country teams, but others are the result of an interagency development process that will serve as the model for future joint efforts. To achieve this, a joint assessment led by INL and including individuals from DoD, DoJ, and others is conducted in the individual countries to identify current capabilities and weaknesses. The resulting assessment generates a list of programs and proposals which are designed to integrate with and support each other. The members of the interagency team are then able to identify which proposals fall with the scope of their expertise and authorities and allow them to collaborate with the interagency for execution. In addition to the assessment process, AFRICOM routinely consults with the interagency community via the interagency personnel embedded with AFRICOM in Stuttgart, daily phone calls to State INL, and participation in various working groups. Through active consultation with the

interagency community we seek to only engage in meaningful projects that directly support foreign policy.

In conclusion, we are still discovering the scope of the problem in West Africa, and are in the process of building a complete picture and comprehensive plan to assist West African countries in becoming capable partners against drug trafficking organizations.

We look forward to continued successful collaboration with the interagency and thank the committee for the opportunity to be here today.