

Statement for the Record
William F. Wechsler
Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense
Counternarcotics and Global Threats

Before the Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control
“Countering Narcotics Threats in West Africa”
May 16, 2012

Chairman Feinstein, Co-Chairman Grassley, and other distinguished members of the Caucus, I appreciate this opportunity to discuss the Department’s counternarcotics (CN) efforts in West Africa.

Before I provide an overview of our program, I would like to thank you for helping to elevate attention about the threat of narcotics and transnational organized crime in West Africa. We are deeply concerned about these issues because of the pernicious effects of illicit trafficking in the region, and its links to supporting criminal and terrorist activity worldwide. As I offer perspective from the Department of Defense (DoD), I would note the following observation: a network of adversaries requires a network to defeat it. As represented by my fellow witnesses here beside me, we must continue to work closely with our interagency colleagues and foreign partners to defeat these networks.

I will provide an overview of DoD’s role in supporting counternarcotics efforts in West Africa, discuss counter transnational organized crime as a national security problem, and highlight some of our collaborative approaches to tackling this problem.

Counternarcotics Program Overview

In support of the Administration’s *National Drug Control Strategy* and *National Strategy to Combat Transnational Organized Crime*, DoD provides support to local, State, Federal, tribal, and foreign agencies to confront the drug trade and narco-terrorism. DoD support to law enforcement includes detecting and monitoring drug trafficking, sharing information, intelligence and analytical support, and helping countries build their capacity to confront drug trafficking and related forms of transnational organized crime. DoD counternarcotics efforts are also focused on maintaining force readiness through demand reduction programs for the U.S. Armed Services.

Because of the national security implications associated with the growing links between drug trafficking and other forms of transnational organized crime, the DoD counternarcotics program supports the theater campaign plans of all six geographic combatant commands (COCOMs). Through its combatant commands, the military departments, and the defense agencies, DoD provides unique military platforms, personnel, systems, and capabilities that support federal law enforcement agencies and foreign security forces involved in counternarcotics missions. The DoD counternarcotics mission in concert with U.S. law

enforcement officials also targets those terrorist groups worldwide that use narcotics trafficking to support terrorist activities.

The Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (DASD) for Counternarcotics and Global Threats (CN>) provides oversight for DoD's counternarcotics activities and resources, reporting to the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations/Low-Intensity Conflict and the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy. The office of the DASD (CN>) was established to ensure that DoD develops and implements a focused counternarcotics program with clear priorities and measured results. Consistent with applicable laws, authorities, regulations, and funding, the office ensures that sufficient resources are allocated to the counternarcotics mission to achieve U.S. national security objectives.

Combating Transnational Organized Crime

The U.S. Government has, for decades, dedicated significant resources to stemming the flow of illicit drugs into the United States, and my office leads the Department of Defense's contributions to that side of the effort. But what our government is in the process of learning is that our traditional focus on countering "drug trafficking organizations" must be expanded to a wider perspective that recognizes that narcotics trafficking is one component of the broader challenge of transnational organized crime. This theme was central to the President's *Strategy to Combat Transnational Organized Crime*, released in July 2011, which declared organized crime to be a national security threat. The strategy calls on the U.S. Government to "build, balance, and integrate the tools of American power to combat transnational organized crime and related threats to our national security."

In addition to the impact of domestic drug abuse, drug trafficking and other forms of transnational organized crime are increasingly supporting terrorists, insurgents, and others hostile forces that pose a significant threat to our national security. In addressing the "crime-terror-insurgency nexus," the strategy is a significant step forward in recognizing the growing array of security challenges global criminal networks pose, understanding the implications of the nexus among criminals, terrorists, and insurgents, and developing effective policy tools to degrade these threats.

What we now see around the world are loose criminal networks that have diversified their illicit activities and also may have connections with other hostile actors, including terrorist groups, insurgencies, and elements of rogue or hostile states. Taking advantage of the integrative mechanisms of globalization, these networked adversaries are able to have greater impact on the global security environment than in previous times. Our effectiveness in countering these hostile actors depends in large part on our ability as a government to also operate as a network: bringing to bear all elements of our law enforcement and national security apparatus on this problem set. Fortunately, we can draw upon many lessons learned from our interagency efforts to confront drug trafficking as we develop whole-of-government approaches to combat transnational organized crime in all its manifestations.

Narcotics and Transnational Organized Crime Threats in West Africa

Largely a result of U.S. enforcement efforts in the Western Hemisphere and of increased demand for cocaine in Europe and elsewhere, drug traffickers have increasingly turned to trafficking cocaine through Africa and on to Europe where the price is higher than in the U.S. West Africa is a region where drug traffickers exploit weak governance as they target the lucrative and growing European market for cocaine. We are also concerned about trafficking of southwest Asian heroin as well as other drugs, such as khat.

I would like to underscore an alarming trend regarding the increased trafficking of methamphetamine and precursor chemicals in West Africa. West Africa appears to be a transshipment area for precursor chemicals diverted for meth production, following an uptick in precursor transshipment since late 2009. The recent spikes in pseudoephedrine/ephedrine importation appear to exceed the legitimate expansion of the pharmaceutical companies in the region, suggesting the increased diversion of precursors into the illicit market for methamphetamine production. In particular, we are also concerned about production of methamphetamine for export to international markets, noting Ghana and Nigeria as likely hubs for methamphetamine production based on increased precursor shipments.

It appears the African continent is an emerging source for meth consumed in East Asia. Since March 2010, numerous arrests of couriers in Asia attempting to smuggle meth from Africa indicates African drug syndicates produce the drug for export to the international market. African-produced meth is smuggled throughout the Asia-Pacific region, with most of the Africa-sourced meth destined for sale in Japan following transshipment through countries such as Malaysia.

Narcotics trafficking in West Africa alarms us for several reasons. We are concerned about the potential for increased use in transit countries. Historically, transit countries cannot remain “immune” from drug trafficking; inevitably, local consumption increases, which has cascading negative effects on the social fabric, stability, and security of the transit country. Drug trafficking is destabilizing, promotes corruption, and undermines governance. Organized crime often co-opts government officials and elites, and corrodes the legitimacy of government institutions. In some cases, criminal groups threaten and challenge the state’s control of its territory. Security and governance institutions in West African countries could be overwhelmed and co-opted as we see in Guinea-Bissau. Some of our traditional partners could be further weakened by narcotics trafficking. Equally troubling is the impact of drug trafficking on post-conflict reconstruction.

While narcotics trafficking remains the predominant type of transnational organized crime in Africa, there has been a diversification of illicit activity in the continent. Criminal networks traffic in people and weapons, often using the same logistical and financial networks as drug traffickers. Armed robbery in the Gulf of Guinea and piracy off the coast of Somalia are a significant security and commercial threat. Somali piracy is typically a ransom-based business model, while maritime crime in the Gulf of Guinea has followed a model more focused on the cargo (usually oil). Both types, however, are lucrative, contribute to local and regional destabilization and insecurity, and have resulted in the complex, opaque criminal infrastructures

with transnational reach. Finally, criminal actors operating in Africa are also turning to kidnapping for ransom as a way to generate or attempt to generate revenue. In addition to Somali pirates, regional violent extremist organizations such as Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb, Boko Haram, and Al Shabaab have also engaged in kidnapping for ransom.

I would also underscore that Africa – particularly the Maghreb and Sahel regions – is home to a burgeoning geopolitical trend with grave implications: the convergence of crime and terrorism. In part because of our successes in squeezing traditional means by which terrorist groups finance themselves, these organizations may exploit a lot of the same vulnerabilities in the region and indirectly profit from drug trafficking. As Director of National Intelligence Clapper has testified, al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb illustrates this trend. In our U.S. Government efforts to defeat al-Qaida, we need to account for the way in which elements of that organization use crime to support their operations.

As recent revelations surrounding Drug Enforcements Administration's (DEA) investigation into the Lebanese Canadian Bank illustrate, Hizballah's activities in West Africa are also of concern. While the nature and extent of the connections in Africa between Hizballah, its representatives, and transnational organized crime remain unclear, this is an issue to which the United States Government is paying ever more attention. Other examples have shown that there is at least a loose connection between individuals with links to Hizballah and the global narcotics trade; we seek to disrupt and degrade this nexus before it becomes more potent and deadly.

DoD Efforts in West Africa

DoD's counternarcotics efforts in West Africa are integrated within a broader U.S. Government approach: the West Africa Cooperative Security Initiative (WACSI). WACSI is a five year, whole-of-government effort, developed in accordance with the President's *Strategy to Combat Transnational Organized Crime*, to address transnational organized crime, particularly drug trafficking, in West Africa. WACSI is the vehicle through which the U.S. Government prioritizes specific countries and areas of focus, helping to make the most efficient and effective use of limited resources. It also allows the U.S. Government to better engage partner nations, multilateral organizations, and other potential donor nations to coordinate support. U. S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM) provided integral analytic support to interagency efforts to develop WACSI.

DoD's chief contribution supporting WACSI is to assist regional counter-drug forces via U.S. law enforcement agencies to execute security operations. The Department invests in building capacity through training, equipping, information sharing, and infrastructure, to enable these partners to take ever greater responsibility for their security. This cost-effective approach helps to strengthen and enable African counter-drug forces to counter transnational organized crime. Counter-drug forces may include police, customs, border guards, gendarmerie, and military components such as naval forces. For example, USAFRICOM executes a robust level of training conducted by both U.S. defense and law enforcement personnel. Training topics include airport interdiction, clandestine meth lab training, money laundering, and investigatory skills.

USAFRICOM maintains counter illicit trafficking as one of the primary lines of effort within its theater campaign plan and subordinate regional campaign plans. Moreover, the counternarcotics program and associated capabilities support the Command's number one priority: attacking and defeating violent extremist organizations. Where there are links between such organizations and drug trafficking, USAFRICOM can leverage the counternarcotics program in support.

It is critical to target the finances of these organizations. DoD is working to expand counter threat finance capabilities through the development of a threat finance cell at USAFRICOM headquarters. The cell will coordinate with U.S. Government agencies and partner nations to deny, disrupt, defeat and degrade our adversaries' ability to use global licit and illicit financial networks through drug interdiction, sanctions, and other law enforcement actions.

I should note the interagency nature of our work is essential to our effectiveness. Almost everything we do in the counternarcotics arena in Africa is by, with, and through our law enforcement and other U.S. Government partners. As one example, USAFRICOM significantly benefits from the presence of detailees and liaison officers from DEA, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Immigrations and Custom Enforcement, and soon U.S. Customs and Border Protection. These representatives are co-located with our DoD counternarcotics staff at USAFRICOM headquarters in Stuttgart, Germany.

The following examples highlight the breadth of our support:

With USAFRICOM support, Cape Verde established the Counternarcotics and Maritime Interagency Operations Center (COSMAR). The facility integrates Cape Verdean law enforcement entities and supported the interdiction of about 1.5 metric tons of cocaine valued at over \$100 million in October 2011. In turn, other U.S. programs, such as the African Maritime Law Enforcement Partnership, leverage COSMAR to further strengthen Cape Verdean capacity.

USAFRICOM, the Department of State, and DEA also collaborated to help Ghana establish a specialized counter-drug unit. USAFRICOM funding helped assist with start-up costs to vet, train and equip the unit to enable investigatory work. We are replicating this successful model in Nigeria and Kenya. The specialized investigatory units are the cornerstone of our efforts and can facilitate coordination with partners in the Western Hemisphere. This unit worked with DEA and other organizations to investigate a Ghana drug trafficking organization shipping heroin from West Africa to the United States, resulting in several seizures and arrests.

The Foreign Narcotics Kingpin Designation Act, commonly known as "The Kingpin Act," provides a powerful complement to the dedicated efforts of U.S. and foreign law enforcement authorities to target drug traffickers operating in West Africa. In 2010, DoD worked in support of U.S. Government partners to designate Ousmane Conte, the son of Guinea's late President Lansana Ousmane Conte, as a Tier I Kingpin. Following, DoD supported the designation of Ibraima Papa Camara and Jose Americo Bubo Na Tchuto. Both men served in the armed forces of Guinea Bissau, and used their position and access to military resources to facilitate the movement of cocaine from South America to Europe. In 2011, DoD supported the designation of John Harun Mwau and Naima Mohamed Nyakiniywa, significant

drug traffickers in Kenya. DoD will continue to work with our partners to degrade and defeat drug trafficking networks operating throughout Africa.

It is important to increase awareness of the severity of meth trafficking and inform our collective understanding of the worldwide movement of meth and meth precursors. Therefore, we are working with DEA to increase such awareness and sponsor training for West African law enforcement partners about meth production. In addition, we will leverage the expertise at Joint Interagency Task Force-West (JIATF-West), headquartered in Honolulu, Hawaii, to support efforts in Africa. JIATF-West remains uniquely positioned to provide awareness to other COCOMs on the meth precursor threat originating from Asia. JIATF-West has developed expertise in tracking suspicious shipments of precursor chemicals that may be diverted to meth production in Africa or other regions.

Looking Ahead

As we look ahead, we can expect that the threat of drug trafficking and its nexus with other threats such as terrorism, insurgency, and other forms of transnational organized crime will continue. It will also evolve to exploit gaps in our defenses and vulnerabilities in our global economy. West African countries are especially vulnerable due to, in many cases, weak rule of law, fragile governments, and ingrained corruption. Many West African states have made remarkable progress in the past decade, but the insidious destabilizing effects of narcotics trafficking and transnational organized crime have the potential to reverse many of these gains.

Where once DoD's counternarcotics efforts were focused in the Western Hemisphere, today we are supporting counternarcotics activities worldwide. At the same time, we recognize that the threat of drug trafficking is one part – albeit the dominant component – of the broader challenges presented by transnational organized crime. Just as the Department of Defense has long sought to understand how hostile states support the armies that may confront us, we now have to understand how non-state adversaries use narcotics trafficking and other types of crime to finance their terrorist and insurgent activities. For the foreseeable future, drug trafficking will continue to be the world's most lucrative criminal enterprise and therefore the one with the greatest ability to fund terrorists, insurgents, and other threats to our national security.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I welcome your questions and comments.