



## State Officials and their Involvement in Drug Trafficking in West Africa

### *Preliminary Findings*

WACD Background Paper No. 5<sup>1</sup>

*Lansana Gberie*



---

<sup>1</sup>This paper is part of a series of background documents prepared for the Commission on the Impact of Drug Trafficking on Governance, Security and Development in West Africa (WACD). The series editor is Camino Kavanagh, Senior Fellow, NYU Center on International Cooperation.

This background paper was prepared for the West Africa Commission on the Impact of Drug Trafficking on Security, Governance and Development in West Africa (WACD).

The views expressed in this paper do not necessarily reflect the views of the WACD.

---

Lansana Gberie is an academic and writer, and works as an expert for the United Nations.

**Contents**

- 1 Introduction.....2**
- 2 Warning Signals and Conceptualizing the Problem.....3**
- 3 Drug Trafficking and its Interaction with the Political Process in West Africa .....7**
  - 3.1 Guinea Bissau..... 8
  - 3.2 Guinea..... 11
- 4 Drug Trafficking, Elections and the Financing of Political Parties .....11**
  - 4.1 Ghana..... 13
  - 4.2 Sierra Leone ..... 14
- 5 Citizens, Politics and the Drug Trade .....16**
- 6 Infiltration of the Security and Financial Systems.....18**
  - 6.1 Ghana..... 18
  - 6.2 Sierra Leone ..... 20
  - 6.3 Liberia ..... 21
- 7 Terrorist Networks and Military Coups .....22**
- 8 Conclusions and Recommendations.....24**
  - 8.1 Preventive measures ..... 25
  - 8.2 Mobilizing political commitment and citizen interest..... 25
  - 8.3 Strengthening capacity ..... 26
  - 8.4 Awareness Raising ..... 26

# State Officials and their Involvement in Drug Trafficking in West Africa - Preliminary Findings

“As West Africa remains a transit point for drug traffickers between South America and Europe, the potential for instability will continue to grow. This is horrendous for the people of the region of the Economic Community of West African States. It also presents a serious challenge to the peace operations in the region authorised by this Council.”

**President Faure Gnassingbé (Togo) at the 6717<sup>th</sup> meeting of the UN Security Council on 21 February 2012.<sup>2</sup>**

“Drug cartels [in West Africa] buy more than real estate, banks and businesses; they buy elections, candidates and parties. In a word they buy power.”

**Antonio Maria Costa, Executive Director of the UNODC, October 2008.<sup>3</sup>**

## 1 Introduction

This paper examines a controversial problem in West Africa: the alleged complicity of state security and political officials in drug trafficking. It builds on the assumption, borne out of experiences in Latin America and the Caribbean, that drug traffickers gain a foothold in a country only through the complicity of senior state political and security officials. Yet, as noted in an earlier WACD paper, it is also informed and facilitated by “the multiple and multi-layered governance deficits in the sub-region that have made it relatively susceptible to external penetration and capture by powerful, well-endowed and tightly-organized drug trafficking networks.”<sup>4</sup>

The low number of convictions of senior state officials for their direct or indirect involvement in drug trafficking, whether in West Africa or elsewhere, makes it difficult to research these issues. Yet, a growing number of cases in which effective investigations and collaboration between states have led to important convictions and which have clearly identified the degree of collusion required to traffic drugs through a state are rendering this task less complex. Indeed, case files or reports from administrative inquiries into trafficking incidents can provide important insights into the depth and scope of the trafficking enterprise, and the degree of involvement or complicity of state officials. Open source material, such as the leaked US diplomatic cables, can be extremely insightful, as can interviews with national and foreign intelligence personnel, judges, and customs officials and similar. Studying non-action by state actors, including the police, the judiciary, internal oversight mechanisms, and even the highest levels of government in response to mounting allegations of state involvement in drug trafficking can also shed light on who might be involved in drug trafficking, colluding with traffickers or blocking investigations into such illicit activity, as can monitoring of some of the pitched media battles that have emerged between political parties regarding illicit sources of party and election campaign funding. In a region where high political office often immunises its

---

<sup>2</sup>See: *S/PV.6717* on 21 February 2012 ‘Peace and security in Africa: The impact of transnational organized crime on peace, security and stability in West Africa and the Sahel region’

<sup>3</sup>‘West Africa under attack’, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 28 October 2008

<sup>4</sup>Adebayo Olokushi (2013), *The Impact of Drug Trafficking on Governance in West Africa*, WACD.

holders from judicial sanctions it may well indicate that in some cases this complicity, passive or active, may involve people who are very high indeed in the political hierarchy.

This background paper was developed using a range of these sources. Combined with information on the significant seizures of cocaine and heroin that have been recorded in the region, the paper suggests that the trafficking of hard drugs is indeed a pernicious problem provoking or exacerbating existing governance challenges such as corruption across West Africa. An open acknowledgement of the problem by West African leaders and political actors (whether in office or in the opposition) is urgently needed in order to bolster on-going efforts to tackle drug trafficking.

The paper focuses principally on hard drugs such as cocaine and heroin which are produced in other regions and which are transhipped through West Africa to Europe and North America, particularly the US. It, therefore, does not discuss marijuana or cannabis – which is widely cultivated, used, and trafficked in West Africa, and is in effect traditional to the region<sup>5</sup> – in the category of illicit drugs that could lead to serious governance and security problems.<sup>6</sup> Neither does it discuss the emerging trend in methamphetamine production and trafficking in the region, although the author recognizes the latter as representing an important emerging challenge, and one that will also have important governance, security and health implications in the coming years.

## 2 Warning Signals and Conceptualizing the Problem

Since at least July 2009, when the the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) issued a grim report entitled *Transnational Trafficking and the Rule of Law in West Africa: A Threat Assessment*, anxiety about the complicity of important political players in drug trafficking in West Africa has been steadily rising in many foreign capitals and among civil society and other actors in the region. The report noted that drug trafficking was placing West Africa “at greater risk” by “undermining the rule of law; deepening corruption; polluting the environment; violating human rights; stealing natural resources; depleting human resources; and jeopardising health.” This, the report noted, “makes West Africa more prone to political instability and less able to achieve the Millenium Development Goals.”<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup>William Jackson Hooker’s *Journal of Botany and Kew Garden Miscellany* (London, 1851) notes information from the British Surgeon in Sierra Leone in the 1840s and 1850s (Sierra Leone was then a British colony), R.O Clarke, that cannabis was at the time “extensively consumed by many Liberated Africans and Creoles, who frequently meet at each other’s houses, to enjoy the luxury and soothing influence of Diamba” (which is still the common name for cannabis in Sierra Leone). Hooker notes that the drug was brought to Sierra Leone by enslaved Africans from the Congo who were captured on the high seas and freed by the British in Sierra Leone, becoming Liberated Africans. . In all likelihood, cannabis, also known at the time as Congo Tobacco (in acknowledgement of its provenance) spread to the rest of West Africa from Sierra Leone.

<sup>6</sup>This choice was made despite the fact that the African Union Commission on the Implementation of the Decisions of the Third Session of the African Conference of Ministers of Drug Control and Crime Prevention in 2011 recognised marijuana as “the most problematic illicit drug in Africa” and estimated that eight per cent of Africa’s population, mostly the youth “many of whom are orphaned and marginalized”, use marijuana, which accounts for 64 percent of drug treatment demand on the continent, without stating the nature of treatment demand. Though illegal, marijuana is widely available and cheap. UNODC estimates that Africa accounts for between 22 percent and 26 percent of the world’s cannabis production, making the continent one of the largest annual sources of cannabis production. UNODC’s 2013 report estimates cannabis use in Africa at 7.5 percent, or nearly double the global average. Cannabis is the drug of choice for the young, the marginalised, and the poor; and its use probably causes less harm than its criminalisation.

<sup>7</sup>UNODC, *Transnational Trafficking and the Rule of Law in West Africa: A Threat Assessment* (July 2009); the report is found at: [https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Studies/West\\_Africa\\_Report\\_2009.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Studies/West_Africa_Report_2009.pdf) (accessed on 10 July 2013.) UNODC’s earlier report, *Cocaine*

The report led to the first UN Security Council debate on the issue on 8 December 2009, during the rotating presidency of Burkina Faso. As a result of the debate, a UN Security Council Presidential Statement (PRST) was issued on February 2010 urging the UN Secretary General to “consider mainstreaming the issue of drug trafficking as a factor in conflict prevention strategies, conflict analysis, integrated-missions’ assessment and planning and peacebuilding support.”<sup>8</sup> The statement noted that drug trafficking and transnational organized crime “contribute to undermine the authority of states.”<sup>9</sup>

Even before the report and the UN Security Council presidential statement, Antonio Maria Costa, Executive Director of UNODC, had been increasingly adamant about the issue. In a 2008 interview with the authoritative London-based newsletter *Africa Confidential*, Costa went so far as to draw a parallel between Europe’s need for cocaine and the role of West Africa in the supply chain of the transatlantic slave trade. He noted that Ghana, which was once known as the Gold Coast, might now be transformed into a ‘coke coast.’<sup>10</sup> In October 2009, Costa suggested that the entire West African ruling elite was complicit in narco-trafficking. In a speech at Praia he told a meeting that:

*Members of the ruling classes benefit from this bloody trade, because of greed and as an insurance policy for hard times when power will be lost. We are aware that major trafficking rings are run from places of power, while counter-narcotic operations (run by low paid, junior officers) are compromised by corrupt, high-level interference... It is up to you – the leaders of West Africa – to turn the tide. To launch a counter attack against drugs and crime you need expensive hardware from abroad, as well as inexpensive software already at your disposal: political will, leadership, and integrity... Yes, you are victims of a global trade – caught in the cross-fire of drug suppliers to the West and drug consumers to the North. But traffickers are targeting your countries because of conditions that enable them to operate with low risk. And many of these wounds are self-inflicted.*<sup>11</sup>

This position was recently amplified by a 100-page report by the U.S Army War College Strategic Studies Institute entitled *The Challenge of Drug Trafficking to Democratic Governance and Human Security in West Africa*. The May 2013 report argued that international drug trafficking networks from Latin America now “represent an existential threat to democratic governance of already fragile states in West Africa” as “independent, rule of law based entities.” Drug traffickers – primarily from Venezuela, Mexico and Colombia – along with their local partners in the region (mainly Nigerians and Ghanaians, who have for decades been involved in illegal narcotics trafficking) are, the report states, using drugs to buy

---

*Trafficking in West Africa: The threat to stability and development* (UNODC, Vienna, 2007) received considerable media attention but did not immediately trigger action on the part of the UN or governments. Its 2005 report, “Crime and Development in Africa,” was the first to meticulously detail the issue. That report noted that “drugs, crime and corruption are undermining development efforts” on the continent, and that “high levels of income inequality, a high share of youth in population, high rates of urbanization, low levels of criminal justice resources, firearms proliferation, wars and civil conflicts as well as weak controls over criminal activities leave Africa vulnerable to organized crime, drug trafficking, trafficking in human beings, money laundering and corruption.”

<sup>8</sup>UN Security Council Presidential Statement,S/PRST/2010/4 (24 February 2010).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup>‘Cocaine Coast,’ *Africa Confidential*, 14 March 2008

<sup>11</sup> James Cockayne, “Discussion Paper for CPPF Informal Meeting on Drug Trafficking and Criminality in West Africa,” Conflict Prevention and Peace Forum, New York, 31 July 2009.

political power, fray West Africa's traditional social fabric, and create a public health crisis.<sup>12</sup> It noted that drug trafficking 'represents the most serious challenge to human security' in West Africa "since resource conflicts rocked several West African countries in the early 1990s."<sup>13</sup>

The report claims that these networks "are using narco-corruption to stage coups d'état, hijack elections, and co-opt or buy political power. Besides a spike in drug-related crime, narcotic trafficking is also fraying West Africa's traditional social fabric and creating a public health crisis, with hundreds of thousands of new drug addicts."<sup>14</sup> The report further amplified more recent anxieties: that international terrorist groups are using the drug trade to fund their activities, the latter potentially having played an important role in the coup and subsequent breakdown of order in Mali, for example. There is, the report stated, "growing links in West Africa between drug trafficking, other forms of transnational organized crime, and international terrorism" and that these links "represent a new security threat to the United States."<sup>15</sup> The report identified four "terrorist groups or state sponsors of terrorism active in drug trafficking in West Africa": Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC); Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM); Hezbollah; and Iran.<sup>16</sup> While many dispute these claims, not least because some of these links have been drawn from sting operations led by non-West African drug enforcement agencies, it is clear that some of the extremist groups active in the Sahel region for example, have engaged in drug trafficking. And despite certain claims, drug trafficking does not necessarily define what these organizations are; rather, as noted, it is just one of the many the illicit activities they engage in, often with the complicity of state officials.

Despite the aforementioned reports, with the exception of Carrier and Klantschnig, whose *Africa and the War on Drugs* (2012)<sup>17</sup> downplayed the role high-level political and security officials play in drug-trafficking in West Africa, only a few have really attempted to assess these links on the ground.<sup>18</sup> Significant challenges remain, not least in terms of providing solid empirical evidence that these same links exist in countries other than Guinea-Bissau, whose condition in this regard appears to be critical. Firstly, while there has been (and in most cases, there continues to be) persistent reports of complicity or involvement of high-level security or political figures in drug trafficking in countries like Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Nigeria, Senegal and Sierra Leone, (and more recently, Benin and Togo), timely cooperation with interested foreign governments, notably the US and the UK, has ensured that at least for the time being, the balance of power has remained on the side of law enforcement. This, however, means that many of those involved in trafficking are often transferred to and convicted in the US or the UK, and therefore access to case files and related material is difficult to obtain. Frequently cases that have been investigated and gone to court in West African countries become heavily politicized, are hampered by investigative and judicial challenges, are shrouded in secrecy: access to information on the judicial process and the related outcome can be limited.

---

<sup>12</sup> David E. Brown, *The Challenge of Drug Trafficking to Democratic Governance and Human Security in West Africa* (Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, May 2013), pp. IX.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, pp. xi

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, pp. xi

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. pp. 21-25.

<sup>17</sup> Neil Carrier and Gernot Klantschnig, *Africa and the War on Drugs* (London: Zed Books 2012)

<sup>18</sup> See CIC-Dfid cases studies on Ghana and Sierra Leone talk about this from a governance perspective. Phil Williams and James Cockayne have also discussed it.

Secondly, a country like Ghana, which appears to be deeply penetrated by drug traffickers, is also held to be a reasonably strong and functioning democracy. Ghana continues to be deemed the leading 'anchor' state in West Africa on account of its long period of stability, steady economic growth, and democratic consolidation.<sup>19</sup> At the same time however, successive governments have been slow to adopt measures that can help buffer the political and security systems from illicit activity such as drug trafficking, while corruption at all levels of the administration remains a significant challenge.

Thirdly, post-conflict countries such as Liberia and Sierra Leone, which could have been immensely vulnerable to capture by international drug traffickers, have managed to avoid this fate due in large measure to the presence of significant external support in the form of large UN peace operations; targeted programmes such as the West Africa Coastal Initiative (WACI); significant bilateral support from the US and the UK, as well as the fact that drug trafficking and its potential impact on peace and security in the region is now a matter the UN Secretary-General regularly reports on to the Security Council. At the same time, however, it is unclear how these countries will continue to prioritize these issues once the UN withdraws and external assistance is scaled back. Indeed, recent examples of drug trafficking incidents involving high level officials and security personnel in both countries suggest that prevalent norms of behavior and the structural weaknesses within and beyond these country's borders that nurture organized criminal activity, particularly drug trafficking, need to be addressed by an integration of national, regional, and international efforts; and that traditional law enforcement efforts still need to be fully integrated with anti-corruption efforts so as to fully unravel the links between organized crime and political and business elites.<sup>20</sup>

Lastly, a country like Nigeria, whose nationals have for many years been key players in drug-trafficking and other forms of organized crime in West Africa, has a legitimate extractive economy large enough to make proceeds from drug trafficking rather marginal, presenting no serious threat to the foundations of the state. Drug trafficking has, in this context, been seen largely as a law-enforcement, rather than political/state security issue. Thus, in June 2013, the Nigeria's National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) announced that since it was set up in 1990, the agency has successfully intercepted a total of 3,434,966.23 kilogrammes of narcotics from drug barons. Ahmadu Giade, chair of the NDLEA claimed that the 'catch' included 2,827,861 kilograms of cannabis, 178,120.73 kilogram of cocaine, 195,283.92 kilograms of heroin, and 233,699 kilograms of psychotropic substances. Within the same period, the country convicted some 21,871 drug traffickers, an achievement that so impressed the government of the United States that it removed Nigeria from the 'Drug Majors List' in 2010. Shortly thereafter, the International Narcotics Control Board (ICNB) 2012 report placed Nigeria at the top of its list for drug trafficking and drug consumption in West Africa, followed closely by Guinea Bissau.

The interaction between drugs and national politics has often, in fact, played out eerily in Nigeria. In May 2013, for example, the NDLEA announced the arrest of a local politician who had allegedly swallowed 2 kilograms (nearly 4.5 pounds) of cocaine at the Murtala Mohammed International Airport in Lagos. He planned to smuggle the drugs to Europe and

---

<sup>19</sup>See David O'Regan, 'Narco-States: Africa's Next Menace,' *New York Times* op-ed, 12 March 2012.

<sup>20</sup> Kavanagh ed., (2013), *Getting Smart and Scaling Up Responding to the Impact of Organized Crime on Governance in Developing Countries*, NYU Center on International Cooperation.



use the proceeds to fund his election campaign. The nature of his confession to the NDLEA suggests that this is a well-worn path for cash-strapped politicians in Nigeria.<sup>21</sup>

The controversial and puzzling case of Buruji Kashamu, a powerful figure in the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), suggests that a successful and wealthy politician's association with drug trafficking is hardly disabling. Kashamu was indicted by a grand jury in the Northern District of Illinois in 1998 for conspiracy to import and distribute heroin to the United States. The indictment named him under his own name as well as two supposed aliases: 'Alaji' and 'Kasmal'. His whereabouts were unknown at the time, however, and his co-accused were tried and convicted. Later that year, he was found living comfortably in England, and, on receipt of an extradition request from the US, the UK authorities arrested Kashamu. After a very protracted proceeding lasting until 2003, however, an English judge refused to extradite Kashamu on grounds of uncertainty about his true identity. Kashamu triumphantly returned to Nigeria and soon after became a key political figure. He is now believed to be very close to President Goodluck Jonathan, because of his ability to mobilise votes in key states in western Nigeria. The US government reviewed Kashamu's case, with the famous Judge Richard Posner presiding. Posner concluded that while Kashamu's identity remains murky, there is little doubt that the figure now exercising authority in Nigeria's PDP is the same as Kashamu the 'Alaji' who was indicted for conspiracy to smuggle illicit drugs into the United States.<sup>22</sup> Despite this, the Nigerian government has persistently ignored calls by civil society groups to investigate Kashamu and extradite him to the US.<sup>23</sup> On 2 July 2013, the Federal Court in Lagos determined that Kashamu should be extradited to the US. Kashamu immediately appealed against this decision; and in November 2013, a new panel of judges constituted by the President of the Court of Appeal unanimously held that his appeal lacked merit, and that Kashamu should be extradited.<sup>24</sup> His extradition to the United States will certainly set an important precedent...unless of course he uses his political skills and contacts to continue avoiding it.

### 3 Drug Trafficking and its Interaction with the Political Process in West Africa

The question that we pose in this paper regarding state complicity or involvement in drug trafficking – whether through political or security actors -is *not so much why this is so but to what extent* it is so.<sup>25</sup> The reason why drug trafficking has become a major issue in West Africa

---

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* Indeed, the politician, Eme Zuru Ayortor, was trying to board a flight to Germany when a scanning machine detected the drug in his stomach. He claimed to the NDLEA that his failed 2007 run for the Edo State House of Assembly ruined him financially and that he had had to resort to drug smuggling drugs as the only way he could fund his 2011 election bid, suggesting that this is a well-worn path. Sapa-AP, "Nigeria politician caught with bellyful of cocaine," May 17, 2010: found at: (<http://www.timeslive.co.za/africa/article454511.ece/Nigeria-politician-caught-with-bellyful-of-cocaine?service=print>)

<sup>22</sup> The case file is: 10-2782 - USA v. Buruji Kashamu: Filed Opinion by Judge Posner, 1 September 2011 (Link: <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/USCOURTS-ca7-10-02782>; accessed on 21 November 2013)

<sup>23</sup> See: *Daily Post* (Nigeria), "Drug trafficking: Group to sue FG over refusal to extradite Ogun PDP chieftain, Buruji Kasamu," 24 August 2013 (<http://dailypost.com.ng/2013/08/24/drug-trafficking-group-to-sue-fg-over-refusal-to-extradite-ogun-pdp-chieftain-buruji-kasamu/>); and *The Punch* (Lagos), "Kashamu dismisses extradition threat to US," 10 July 2013 (found at: <http://www.punchng.com/news/kashamu-dismisses-extradition-threat-to-us/> on 21 November 2013);

<sup>24</sup> See: Olugbega Soyeye, "Court Dismisses PDP Chieftains Application Against Extradition", *Leadership News* (Nigerian newspaper) found at: <http://leadership.ng/news/131113/court-dismisses-pdp-chieftains-application-against-extradition> (24 November 2013).

<sup>25</sup> An earlier paper commissioned by the WACD focuses more on the driving factors. See Adebayo Olokushi: The Impact of Drug Trafficking on Governance in West Africa at:

recently has now been exhaustively analysed by various scholars and researchers.<sup>26</sup> The region's proximity to Europe and its convenient location between South America and Europe – also an important factor during the trans-Atlantic slave trade – is a strong attraction, as is its weak law enforcement, the widespread tolerance of smuggling among both elite and ordinary people, its widespread poverty and high youth unemployment, and the sheer allure of apparently easy wealth to be gotten through participation in the drug trade. Of great importance as well is the existence of predatory elite which makes little distinction between the legal and the illicit in its drive to accumulate wealth as a key measure of power and influence, and as guarantor of both.

A crucial external factor from the mid-2000s included US law enforcement efforts in the Caribbean, which pushed Latin American cocaine trafficking networks away from the US market and towards the rapidly growing European market. The increasing militarization of the response to drug trafficking by the US in its neighbourhood also played a role in this regard. West African (mainly Nigerian and Ghanaian) drug trafficking networks, faced with restrictions to transit routes through Asia and the Middle East, increasingly turned to East Africa by 2011, and now use weak and vulnerable states in West Africa for transshipment of heroin. Since then, West Africa has become the major transit and repackaging hub for cocaine and heroin flowing from the Latin American and South Asian producing areas to European markets.

A number of questions arise: to what extent have state actors in West Africa played a role in ensuring safe passage of drugs through the region? How has this relationship played out? What effect does it have on the state? Does it lead to the criminalization of the state? What are the key entry points for drug-traffickers in their attempt to compromise state actors, or how do state actors themselves become involved? This paper is an initial attempt to answer some of these questions. In doing so it examines a number of cases where available evidence – primarily judicial records, reports of commissions of inquiry, news reports, leaked US embassy cables, and interviews the author conducted in Ghana, Liberia and Sierra Leone in March, April and July 2013 – makes empirical study of the relations between drug trafficking and state actors possible.

### 3.1 Guinea Bissau

Guinea-Bissau is broadly referred to today as a 'narco-state', i.e. a state whose governance has been neutered by the imperatives of international drug trafficking. Guinea-Bissau academics and civil society activists hotly dispute this characterization, contending that drug-related corruption is confined to the top hierarchy of the military and the police and a section of the political elite with close links to the military. The real problem, they argue, is state weakness and inherent vulnerabilities. The country's largely unpatrolled 350 km of coastline and an archipelago (Bijagos) consisting of some 88 un-policed islands does not help. Neither does the dozens of aircraft landing strips, vestiges of Portugal's colonial reign and the Guinea-Bissau long liberation war. The latter allow Latin American drug cartels using small aircraft easy access to the islands, which they use as distribution hubs for cocaine. The low risk of

---

<sup>26</sup>Emmanuel Kwaku Akyeampong, 'Diaspora and drug trafficking in West Africa: a case study of Ghana', *African Affairs* 104, 416 (2005), pp. 429–47; Stephen Ellis, 'West Africa's International Drug Trade', *African Affairs* (108) 431, pp.171–196 (2009); Camino Kavanagh ed. (2013), *Getting Smart and Shaping Up: Responding to the Impact of Drug Trafficking in Developing Countries*, NYU Center on International Cooperation; and several reports by UNODC. See also Adebayo O. Olukoshi, *Drug Trafficking and Its Impact on Governance in West Africa* WACD Background Paper No. 31 (found at: <http://www.wacommissionondrugs.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Drug-Trafficking-and-its-impact-on-Governance-in-West-Africa-Final-Version-2013-06-24.pdf>)

detection by the underfunded and poorly equipped maritime officials and airport authorities is an additional attraction.<sup>27</sup>

There has indeed been much difficulty precisely defining a narco-state. However, a 2006 doctoral thesis on Guinea-Bissau set out some important elements that must be present to make the term reasonably applicable.<sup>28</sup> Senior state officials must be complicit, either tacitly or actively, in facilitating the trade. The state in question must also be an extremely violent environment, where general human security is compromised and there is in existence something like 'drug-funded insurgencies' where competing traffickers and or dealers fight one another for control of the market. Moreover, according to Bybee, the term "can even connote a public health issue where a significant portion of the population may be addicted to a locally-cultivated drug. As such, designating a state as a 'narco-state' does not tell us much about the nature of the relationship between the drugs and the state, other than there is one."<sup>29</sup> In this context, countries as different as Jamaica, Mexico, and Guinea-Bissau have been deemed 'narco-states.'<sup>30</sup>

Guinea-Bissau exhibits many of these characteristics, although the civil environment has never been as violent as, for example, Jamaica. It has however, been decidedly more political unstable.<sup>31</sup> Already a profoundly weak and dysfunctional state by the time drug traffickers gained a foothold there in the mid-2000s, with a history of military coups and assassinations of political and military leaders, after yet another rash of political assassinations by soldiers in March 2009, the country was considered by United Nations, US officials and independent experts to be increasingly becoming a narco-state. Since 12 April 2012, when the armed forces, once again, seized power and imprisoned interim President Raimundo Pereira, former Prime Minister and presidential candidate Carlos Gomes Junior, and several other senior officials, drug trafficking has reportedly become the key economic activity of the country's leading military elite (which controls the state), with the UN reporting at least twenty transatlantic flights involving small aircraft loaded with drugs landing in Bissau in the following six months after the coup.<sup>32</sup> Evidence has emerged since the coup that the overthrown civilian regime was itself heavily involved in drug trafficking, suggesting that the military launched the coup to take full control of the trade from the civilians who were perhaps too timid to anchor a more robust involvement of the state.<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup>Author's communication with Guinea-Bissau scholar, Dr. Patricia Godinho Gomes, via email and skype on 21 November 2013.

<sup>28</sup>Ashley Neese Bybee, "Narco State or Failed State? Narcotics and Politics in Guinea-Bissau," a dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at George Mason University (2006).

<sup>29</sup> Ibid

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. pp. 86-90.

<sup>31</sup> Reliable data on illicit drug use in Guinea-Bissau is unavailable, but locally-produced marijuana is widely consumed in the country, as its government admitted in 2011 in a policy document entitled "Political Declaration to counter Drug Trafficking and Organized Crime in Guinea-Bissau". Signed by Prime Minister Carlos Gomes Junior, the declaration noted that the government was 'conscious' of the fact that marijuana is the "illicit drug the most produced, distributed and consumed in Guinea-Bissau, especially among the youth". See: Republic of Guinea-Bissau, "Political Declaration to counter Drug Trafficking and Organized Crime in Guinea-Bissau" 24 June 2011 (found at: [http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:JHViGoL6J\\_gJ:www.uniogbis.unmissions.org/LinkClick.aspx%3Ffileticket%3DKxKtQvRBP1w%253D%26tabid%3D9915%26language%3Den-US&cd=2&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=ca](http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:JHViGoL6J_gJ:www.uniogbis.unmissions.org/LinkClick.aspx%3Ffileticket%3DKxKtQvRBP1w%253D%26tabid%3D9915%26language%3Den-US&cd=2&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=ca)).

<sup>32</sup>'Admiral of the White,' *Africa Confidential* 12 April 2013.

<sup>33</sup> 'All at Sea over Drugs,' *Africa Confidential*, 10 May 2013.

On 2 April 2013, United States Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) agents arrested Vice-Admiral José Américo Bubo Na Tchuto, a powerful former head of Guinea-Bissau's navy, along with two of his aides, in a sting operation. According to the official indictment, Na Tchuto had agreed to import some four tonnes of cocaine, of which 500 kg (1,102 lbs) would go to the United States.<sup>34</sup> He is now facing trial in a court in New York. The charges against him allege that Na Tchuto demanded US\$1 million for each metric tonne of cocaine brought into Guinea-Bissau and destined for the US, and that he offered a company he owned to be used as a front to ship the drugs. He claimed he had briefed his country's discredited and largely unrecognised transitional president, Manuel Serifo Nhamadjo, on the plan. As part of that plan, Na Tchuto agreed to help ship arms to members of the Colombian rebel group Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia or FARC, which is designated a terrorist organisation by the US and operates one of the world's largest cocaine trafficking operations.

The operation that led to the capture of Na Tchuto, the first time the DEA had targeted such high-ranking officials in an African state, had also targeted Guinea-Bissau's Army Chief of Staff and leader of the April 2012 coup, General António Indjai. Indjai was not captured but an indictment has been unsealed against him in New York. Indjai, as well as NaTchuto and Brigadier Gen. Ibraima Papa Camará, the Air Force Chief of Staff, were designated 'drug kingpins' by the US Treasury in 2010.<sup>35</sup>

This singular record suggests that Guinea-Bissau is currently in a class of its own in West Africa, though its characterisation as a narco-state may still be premature and incautious. Concurrently, it is unclear how the country will emerge from the current situation and its decades of political turmoil. Even if drug trafficking might have been stemmed through the arrest of the afore-mentioned high-level officials, there is no indication that the country's structural challenges will be resolved any time soon, leaving the country's governance structures vulnerable to internal manipulation and the door to further involvement of the country's 'governors' in criminal activity wide open. Worthy of mention in this regard is the fact that despite repeated recommendations by the UN Secretary-General to establish a panel of experts to investigate the drug trafficking situation in Guinea-Bissau, the initiative has gained limited traction within the UN Security Council.<sup>36</sup> Specifically, the UN Secretary-General recommended that support be provided (via UNODC) for the "establishment and functioning of a panel of experts that could be set up by the Security Council to actively combat drug trafficking networks and facilitate the adoption of targeted sanctions against drug traffickers and their accomplices" noting that "the UN stands ready to make available its expertise to assist in the establishment and functioning of the panel."<sup>37</sup> Such an initiative might have helped, at the minimum, to shed public light on the scope and depth of the problem; help clarify the degree of penetration of the political system; identify the institutions and elites most amenable to change; and add legitimacy and ownership to responding to the problem in Guinea-Bissau and the broader sub-region.

---

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.justice.gov/usao/nys/pressreleases/April13/GuineaBissauArrestsPR/U.S.%20v.%20Na%20Tchuto%20et%20al%20Indictment.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> David Lewis and Richard Valdins, 'Capture of a 'drug kingpin', *Reuters* 24 July 2013; also 'Admiral of the White,' *Africa Confidential*.

<sup>36</sup> The initiative, initially mooted by the UN Secretary-General in a recommendation made to the Security Council in 2012 was reiterated by the Secretary-General in February and March 2013. Report nos.

<sup>37</sup> See in particular, Report of the UN Secretary-General on developments in Guinea-Bissau, including efforts towards the restoration of constitutional order, and on the activities of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in that country. S/2013/262

## 3.2 Guinea

It is important to note that traffickers have made serious efforts to subvert, weaken, or even takeover relatively stronger and better-governed states in West Africa. A near miss in this regard was Guinea under the ailing and corrupt Lansaná Conté. In the final years of Conté's ramshackled rule, Guinea appeared to be rapidly heading towards becoming a fully-fledged narco-state. Conté was alleged to have been personally involved with the traffickers; and his son, Ousmane, was in fact the leading trafficker in the country. Senior military staff, with the knowledge of the president, actively participated in massive trafficking operations, and special airstrips were even constructed inside the country for the small planes ferrying cocaine from Latin America to land. Visiting Latin American drug barons were said to have enjoyed presidential escorts, security and lavish hospitality, while drugs were shipped to Europe from the country through diplomatic pouches.<sup>38</sup> Shortly after Conté's death in 2009, the military (which had seized power) publicly displayed laboratories and precursor chemicals used to make hard drugs that the ubiquitous presidential son, Ousmane, had set up in the country. The discovered drugs cache was reported to have a street value of about US \$154 million.<sup>39</sup> Clearly, only the timely death of Conté in December 2008, followed by a chaotic, incompetent and shortlived military regime, and the establishment of more competitive politics and democratic civilian rule, saved Guinea from the fate that has befallen its smaller more impoverished neighbour, Guinea-Bissau.

Significantly enough, it was President Conté who introduced Guinea-Bissau's President João Bernardo 'Nino' Vieira to Colombian drug traffickers in 2005.<sup>40</sup> The Colombians are believed to have financed Vieira's lavish re-election campaign that year,<sup>41</sup> effectively putting him and his country at their service. As the case of Guinea-Bissau's Vieira demonstrated, an attractive and logical entry point for international drug traffickers into West African states has been the electoral process, representing one of three major scenarios that highlight the manner in which the drug trafficking problem is currently playing out in the region. The other scenarios are: infiltration of the security and financial systems; and terrorist networks and military coups.

## 4 Drug Trafficking, Elections and the Financing of Political Parties

We are in the era of elections in West Africa, and almost all countries in the sub- region conduct periodic elections which, though often rigged and sometimes violent, present choices and opportunities for a change in political leadership – local councillors, parliamentarians and even presidents. The stakes are often huge. Only a decade ago most West African countries “were bywords for anarchy and bloodshed,” the influential magazine *The Economist*, which notoriously deemed Africa “the hopeless continent” in 2000, sighed optimistically in July 2010. But now “their people vote enthusiastically. It will be hard even for dictators to take that right away altogether, for the experience of elections, even flawed ones, seem to help embed democracy.” It added: “African countries need political systems that can punish corruption,

---

<sup>38</sup> See Colin Freeman, 'New drug Threat to West Africa, warns president of Guinea,' *Daily Telegraph*, 15 June 2013; found at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/guinea/10121817/New-drug-threat-to-West-Africa-warns-president-of-Guinea.html> (accessed on 12 July 2013)

<sup>39</sup> Rose Skelton, 'Why West Africa cannot break its drug habit', *BBC News*, 21 June 2010 ; found at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10324206> (accessed on 26 July 2013)

<sup>40</sup> Vieira had first come to power via a military coup in 1980 and was the country's first leader to be fully enaged in drug-trafficking. See 'All at Sea over Drugs,' *Africa Confidential*, 10 May 2013.

<sup>41</sup> 'All at Sea over Drugs,' *Africa Confidential*.

mediate between tribal groups and competing economic interests and turf incompetents out peacefully. Democracy is the only way they are going to get them.”<sup>42</sup>

It is, however, not as easy and clear-cut as that. Elections, as evidenced in the US and elsewhere, are expensive affairs, and political parties – the key instruments of electoral politics – are not publicly funded in most of West Africa. In far too many cases, presidential candidates tend to own parties, funding them from their private resources or raising support from friends, regional allies, or from their ethnic base. Since political financing is largely under-regulated, with rules governing fund-raising often ignored or not enforced, the temptation to solicit financial support from dubious sources or, as in the case of the Nigerian politician referred to above, use the spoils of trafficking to fund campaigns, is great.

In a *New York Times* article on Jamaica - a violence-ridden yet staunch democracy - Harvard sociologist Orlando Patterson examined, how diverse societies experimenting with democratic elections “are especially vulnerable to ethnic conflict and organized crime.” For decades, Patterson wrote, political leaders in Jamaica relied on armed local gangs to mobilise voters, and these politicians rewarded the gangs with the ‘spoils of power’, in particular housing and employment contracts once they won. The gangs “eventually moved into international drug trafficking, with their leaders, called ‘dons,’ becoming ever more powerful,” Patterson wrote. In the event, the “tables turned quite some time ago, with the politicians becoming dependent on the dons for their survival.” Violence became endemic on the streets on Jamaica, with rival gangs, operating with complete impunity, fighting each other for control of the drug market. It was how Jamaica – once only a transit point for cocaine traffickers, but already with “paltry rates of economic growth, widespread poverty and income inequality, vast urban slums and a police force considered brutal and despised by the poor” – gradually became a narco-state. The incursion into the Tivoli garrison town in 2010 leading to the detention and extradition of Christopher ‘Dudus’ Coke<sup>43</sup> to the US, and the severity of its collateral effects<sup>44</sup> appears to have marked the beginning of vigorous efforts by both national and international actors to put the problem under control.<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup>‘African Elections: The Power of the Angry Voter,’ *The Economist* 22 July 2010; see: <http://magic.economist.com/node/16640349> Jul 22nd 2010 (accessed 2 July 2013)

<sup>43</sup> Christopher ‘Dudus’ Coke was the head of the infamous Shower Posse, a gang that controlled sizable portions of organized crime activity on the island, also wanted in the United States on charges of drug trafficking and racketeering.

<sup>44</sup>The incursion also led to the death of some seventy civilians.

<sup>45</sup>Orlando Patterson, ‘Jamaica’s Bloody Democracy,’ *New York Times*, 29 May 2010. Desmond Enrique Arias has shown in the case relating to a notorious drug dealer, Christopher “Dudus” Coke in 2010, the extent of the power of the drug dealers over Jamaica’s government. When the Obama administration requested Coke’s extradition to the US to face criminal charges, he writes, Jamaica’s government dithered to the point that Prime Minister Bruce Golding nearly lost power. He writes: “The Golding government had done everything in its power and more to avoid arresting Coke, including hiring a US-based law firm to lobby the Obama Administration to withdraw its request. When Golding’s attempt to evade Jamaica’s international treaty obligations came to light, the country’s political establishment shuddered. Golding resigned as leader of the Jamaica Labor Party (JLP), potentially opening the door to new elections. His party, however, refused to accept his resignation and the administration staggered onwards. The US government found innovative ways to pressure his government, including cancelling the US visa of prominent JLP supporters, thereby creating significant business difficulties and embarrassment for a portion of the Jamaican elite.” See: Arias, *Getting Smart and Scaling Up: The Impact of Organized Crime on Governance in Developing Countries* (New York: NYU’s Center for International Cooperation, June 2013). This document is found at: [http://cic.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/kavanagh\\_crime\\_developing\\_countries\\_jamaica\\_study.pdf](http://cic.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/kavanagh_crime_developing_countries_jamaica_study.pdf) (accessed on 20 August 2013). For recent efforts to put the drug problem under control in Jamaica, see Damien Cave, ‘Jamaica Fights to Break Grip of Violent Past’, *New York Times*, 17 August 2013.

Is something like this happening, or likely to happen, in West Africa aside from Guinea-Bissau? Certainly, a large body of anecdotal and other evidence suggests that drug traffickers have been key funders of political parties and of individual politicians in Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Senegal, Sierra Leone and elsewhere in West Africa.

#### 4.1 Ghana

For example, during the 2008 parliamentary and presidential elections in Ghana, speculations were rife in well-informed quarters that drug money was funding key political players, including at least one of the more prominent presidential candidates.<sup>46</sup> Raymond Kwame Amankwah, a notorious Ghanaian drug trafficker who is currently serving a 14 year-prison term at the Provisional Detention Centre at Caucaia in Brazil for drug trafficking, is reputed to have been a major donor to the then ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP). When Amankwah was jailed in Brazil, the government seized his vast property in Ghana, pending further investigation. A few months later Nana Akufo-Addo, who had by then been nominated Attorney General –and subsequently presidential candidate for the NPP – quietly returned the property to Amankwah’s family.<sup>47</sup> Leaked US diplomatic cables quoted frustrated British officials assisting the Ghanaian government in its efforts against drug trafficking under Operation Westbridge<sup>48</sup> telling the Americans that the Ghanaians were now, as the crucial 2008 elections approached, “more indifferent to the narcotics issue than in 2006 and had made little progress to tackle this problem in the past year.”<sup>49</sup>

Though always hard to prove, allegations that major political parties in Ghana are funded by drug traffickers are routinely traded between rival politicians, and these allegations sometimes appear credible. They are, in any case, not credibly denied. Even more important, the country’s two major parties have shown no interest in seriously reviewing the law governing party funding and elections, which are becoming increasingly expensive. Political party funding mechanisms are opaque; and, as a recent study argued, the increasing number of high-level officials and mid- and low-level public officials that have been found to be involved in drug trafficking and money laundering “indicates deep structural challenges and indications that crime is also being used in support of the political process.” Moreover, though “there have been positive results in investigating and prosecuting different cases involving mid- to high-level public officials implicated in drug-related offences, the majority have gone unpunished, seriously undermining the legitimacy of state institutions and providing limited disincentives for citizens not to engage in illicit activity.”<sup>50</sup>

Significantly enough, some of the most dramatic cases in which officials have been prosecuted and punished have involved foreign assistance, including the DEA-supported ‘vetted unit’ in Ghana’s national drug control body – NACOB. An oft-cited example involves a Member of

---

<sup>46</sup>See: BBC News, ‘Drug money ‘tainting Ghana poll’,’ 28 October 2008; found at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7695981.stm> (accessed on 10 July 2013). Also: Tristan McConnell, ‘Rumors of cocaine money taint Ghana vote,’ The Christian Science Monitor.

<sup>47</sup>Author’s interview with senior police officer in Accra, Ghana, on 10 July 2013

<sup>48</sup> Operation Westbridge is a joint project set by HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) in conjunction with the Ghanaian narcotics authorities to catch drug smugglers using Accra airport as a gateway to the UK and other European countries.

<sup>49</sup>‘Cables Portray Expanded Reach of Drug Agency,’ *New York Times*, 25 December 2010

<sup>50</sup>See Camino Kavanagh ed., *Getting Smart and Scaling Up Responding to the Impact of Organized Crime on Governance in Developing Countries* (New York: Center on International Cooperation, June 2013), 12-13; found at: [http://cic.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/kavanagh\\_crime\\_developing\\_countries\\_report.pdf](http://cic.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/kavanagh_crime_developing_countries_report.pdf) (accessed on 22 August 2013).

Parliament from a district north of Kumasi who had been trafficking heroin to the United States. He is now serving a sentence in that country, due to be released in 2014. According to Aning *et al*, it is highly likely that if he runs for office again, he would be widely backed by his constituency, who saw limited discredit in his illicit activities since he significantly reinvested in development initiatives in the area.<sup>51</sup> Given that his sentence was served in the United States, it is unclear whether existing provisions preventing candidates with a criminal record from running for office would be observed.

Another recent example relates to the case of Solomon Adelaquaye, the former managing director of the privately owned Sohini Security Company (which was responsible for security at the Kotoka International Airport). Adelaquaye was arrested and extradited to New York in May 2013 where he was charged with conspiring to smuggle Afghan heroin to the US. Commenting on the arrest, an opposition parliamentarian took to the airwaves in Ghana claiming that the current National Democratic Congress (NDC) received significant electoral funding from Adelaquaye. The parliamentarian, Kennedy Ohene Agyapong, of the opposition NPP and a presidential aspirant who himself has been accused by rivals of drug trafficking, told a local radio station that the NDC acronym should be read as “Narcotics Dealers Congress”.<sup>52</sup> These allegations have not been confirmed and it is unlikely they will be; notwithstanding, the repeated failure on the part of political actors to put in place measures to protect the political process from illicit funding only serves to suggest that there is some truth in the allegations. The pitched media battle that followed the arrest of Adelaquaye also suggests that external assistance in support of special units such as NACOB, while welcome, is also insufficient; rather, this form of support needs to go hand-in-hand with efforts to deal with deeper structural challenges hampering the political process.

## 4.2 Sierra Leone

A notorious case involving cocaine trafficking in Sierra Leone in 2008 was more clearly suggestive of the link between traffickers and electoral politics, and how the one supports the other. In the very early morning of 13 July 2008, a small aircraft bearing fake Red Cross insignia landed at Sierra Leone’s only international airport at Lungi without authorisation. Through the singular efforts of a junior air traffic controller – who, perhaps because of his low rank, was not brought into the plot by agents and collaborators of the traffickers at the airport – the plane was seized by the Airport Authority. On inspection, officials discovered over 600 kilograms of cocaine along with arms and ammunition. Seven foreign nationals – three Colombians, two Mexicans, a Venezuelan and an American – were arrested in connection with the drug seizure, along with eleven Sierra Leoneans. The Sierra Leoneans arrested included “Mohamed Bashil Sesay” or Ahmed Sesay, the cousin and close protégé of the Minister of Transport and Aviation, Kemoh Sesay. Sesay, along with the seventeen others, were charged retroactively for the offences of importation of cocaine, “a prohibited drug without lawful authority Contrary to Section 7(b) of the National Drugs Control Act No 10 of 2008 (as amended).”<sup>53</sup> They were detained in Freetown’s Pademba Road prison; 16 were subsequently found guilty, fined and sentenced, and two were acquitted. In April 2009, after months of

---

<sup>51</sup> Ibid

<sup>52</sup> ‘Busted Drug Dealer Solomon Adelaquaye Is Financier Of The NDC - Ken Agyapong’, Ghanaweb, 6 June 2013; found at: <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/artikel.php?ID=276174> (found on 16 July 2013). It was later reported that over 1 million euros had been found in Adelaquaye’s Accra bank account.

<sup>53</sup> Sierra Leone had no laws against drug trafficking before the seizures, and the existing narcotics act – covering only pharmaceutical drugs – had to be quickly significantly amended to try the traffickers retroactively.



negotiation, Sierra Leone expelled three of the foreign nationals. They were subsequently flown to the US to face charges.

A number of significant details emerged during the trial.<sup>54</sup> Ahmed Sesay was on the fundraising committee of the then opposition All Peoples Congress (APC) party during the campaigns and the subsequent presidential, parliamentary and local government elections in 2008. For a party which was overthrown in 1992 and had been out of power since, the APC appeared to be surprisingly well-funded, matching the ruling Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP) almost evenly in campaign spending. The APC and its leader, Ernest Bai Koroma, won the elections, and Koroma became president. His first appointment included Kemoh Sesay, as minister in charge of the international airport and seaports. Shortly after that appointment, Koroma also appointed Ahmed Sesay the manager of the national football team, a position that allowed him frequent official travel abroad, sometimes with the national team in chartered flights that are often not properly screened at airports. So close was Sesay to the seat of power that in early 2008 he organised a fund-raising event at State House, the presidential palace, at which several corporate bodies pledged \$200,000 in support of the national team.

Unfortunately for Sesay, however, the impounding of the cocaine plane attracted massive national and international attention, and the UK – Sierra Leone’s most important bilateral donor – dispatched officials to assist with the investigation. Sesay was so central to the cocaine trafficking operation that the government could not shield him from prosecution. Still, it appears that the government protected the other Sesay, the Minister of Transport and Aviation, whose proximity to the presidency was such that his prosecution would have greatly embarrassed President Koroma. As presiding judge, Nicholas Browne-Marke, noted, this hampered the entire prosecution. Evidence emerged during the trial that Kemoh Sesay had advance knowledge of the incoming cocaine plane, and gave permission to airport authorities – barring the lowly air traffic controller – for the plane to land. In his 100-page judgement, Browne-Marke wrote that the government was guilty of obstruction of justice for preventing the trial of Kemoh Sesay. “I must express my strong disapproval” for the government’s refusal to prosecute Sesay, he wrote, since, apart from withholding vital evidence, this meant that the judge had to acquit two accused who would otherwise have been convicted. “In my view,” Browne-Marke wrote, “the [state] prosecution was holding back vital evidence and was prepared to jeopardise their case in order to save perhaps one person from perdition.” This was, he continued, “a blatant act of subornation of perjury” by the state.<sup>55</sup> Ahmed Sesay received a five-year sentence but was released in November 2011 after paying a fine of 300 million leones. To the bewilderment of many in and outside the country, in 2010 Koroma appointed Minister Kemoh Sesay, whom he had suspended from office after being named in the cocaine investigation, as his senior presidential adviser. After his re-election to another five-year term in 2012, Koroma appointed Kemoh Sesay Minister of Political and Public Affairs.

Since the trial, no major seizures of hard drugs have been made in Sierra Leone. Records from the Transnational Organised Crime Unit (TOCU) – a national inter-agency body sponsored by the UN-backed West Africa Coast Initiative (WACI) that gathers and analyses information, and

---

<sup>54</sup> The author followed the trial rather closely in Freetown, and discussed it at length with Justice Browne-Mark in Dakar, Senegal, in April 2012.

<sup>55</sup> Sierra Leone Judiciary, *THE STATE AND GEROGUE ARITSTIZABEL ARCHILLA and 17 Others* (Trial judgment is in the author’s possession). See also Sierra Leone case study by Walker in Kavanagh ed., (2013), *Getting Smart and Scaling Up: Responding to the Impact of Organized Crime on Governance in Developing Countries*. NYU, Center on International Cooperation, found at: [http://cic.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/kavanagh\\_crime\\_developing\\_countries\\_sierra\\_leone\\_study.pdf](http://cic.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/kavanagh_crime_developing_countries_sierra_leone_study.pdf)

develops operational intelligence to support its lead investigative role in the most complex crime cases – show that in 2012 Sierra Leone prosecuted only two people for possession of cocaine and two for possession of heroin, both of them local dealers in Freetown.<sup>56</sup> The absence of dramatic or large seizures, however, may not mean that the drugs are no longer trafficked through Sierra Leone. Rather, it might reflect the fact that the traffickers have become more sophisticated, and their activities more routinised in the country.<sup>57</sup>

## 5 Citizens, Politics and the Drug Trade

As the case of Jamaica showed, though West Africa is mainly a transit point for drugs from elsewhere destined for Europe, it is a dangerous assumption to conclude that it will remain so. The reality is that once international drug traffickers establish themselves in a transit country, they tend to start paying local agents in kind rather than in cash, and the drugs are then sold in local communities. Since the 1990s, oil-rich Nigeria already had a flourishing consumer market for heroin and cocaine; and in 2010, UNODC estimated cocaine use in Ghana – a country with a rising middle class – among Ghanaians of 15 years and older at 1.1 percent of the population, almost as high as that in the UK (1.7 percent of the population), which is one of the most flourishing markets for such drugs in the world. This figure is higher than the African average; and *UNODC's World Drug Report for 2013*, issued in February, estimates cocaine use in West Africa as “likely significantly higher than the global average”.<sup>58</sup> The report estimates the number of cocaine users in West and Central Africa at 1.6 million in 2012, adding that owing to the “paucity of data, however, the uncertainty regarding this number is particularly pronounced, with a corresponding range of 570,000 to 2.4 million cocaine users.” The report noted an increase in the use of cocaine, particularly in West Africa, noting that this increase is “linked with the trafficking of cocaine into and through the region.”<sup>59</sup>

A UN Security Council report of 17 June 2013 highlighted an important new concern: the impact of the increasing illicit narcotics use on the prevalence rate of HIV in West Africa. In Senegal, 9.1 percent of injecting illicit drug users were found to be HIV positive, the report stated, and about 4 percent of new HIV infections in Ghana are attributed to injecting drug use. The report noted an analysis in 2007 of the modes of HIV transmission in Nigeria which

---

<sup>56</sup>TOCU Crime Statistics from January to December 2012 (in author's possession)

<sup>57</sup>In an email communication with the author on 30 September 2013, Michael von der Schulenburg, who was the UN Secretary-General's Executive Representative in Sierra Leone from 2008 to 2012, noted that traffickers very likely decided to avoid using Sierra Leone after the high-profile trial of the cocaine traffickers in 2008. Schulenburg noted that the vigour of the response from both the Government of Sierra Leone and the international community was such that in the subsequent years “We could not find real evidence for Sierra Leone's continuous involvement in transnational drug trade. Quite the opposite, all we could see was relatively encouraging.” Moreover, he wrote, while transnational illicit drug trafficking often triggers local drug addiction problems, “we could not observe any substantial increase in drug addiction from cocaine, heroin or derivative hard drugs... WHO and UNICEF had a pretty good overview of what happened in local hospitals and health centers and there were no reports of any substantial increase in drug addiction. Nor did we observe large numbers of addicts roaming and begging in the streets of Freetown or other urban centers.” A UN police officer the author spoke to in Freetown in September 2013 was less sanguine. He noted that trafficking now mostly involves the use of international containerized maritime shipping from areas of narcotics production to West Africa, and serviced by smaller vessels operating on localized routes connecting to “mother ships” from Latin America. Notwithstanding, the absence of reliable statistics on either trafficking or consumption trends does not allow for an informed assessment of the current situation.

<sup>58</sup> UNODC's *World Drug Report for 2013*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

showed that injecting drug use (IDU) had contributed to 9.1 percent of new infections; the prevalence of HIV among such drug users was estimated at 5.6 percent.<sup>60</sup>

As a result of this widespread use, Ghana's Narcotics Control Board and the Ghanaian police spend nearly as much time monitoring the operations of dealers within Ghana as they do traffickers.<sup>61</sup> Consequently, anti-narcotics related prosecutions and actual sentencing have substantially increased in recent years. In April 2011, for example, six people were sentenced to long terms in prison for unlawful possession of twenty-two boxes of cocaine "found hidden in a concealed compartment behind a big-sized mirror" in a house belonging to a notorious dealer.<sup>62</sup> Officials believe that big time cocaine dealers and traffickers have made Ghana a base, from where they use laundered money to buy cocaine and heroin brought into the country from South America, which they then traffic to Europe.<sup>63</sup>

Ghana's late president John Atta Mills was so alarmed by this trend that in January 2010 he told the US Assistant Secretary of State for African affairs, Johnnie Carson, that the drug trafficking problem and the increasing use of such dangerous narcotics among Ghana's youth poses "a bleak future for Ghana."<sup>64</sup> This wisened-up view, expressed by a conscientious leader, may not be widely shared in the region. It clearly competes with the views of a former president of Liberia, Charles Taylor, who represents the extreme opposite of the good governance credentials of Atta-Mills. A fellow inmate of his in a Ghanaian prison before he launched his 'rebellion' in Liberia in late 1989 reported those views later:

'In one of our numerous, prolonged arguments whilst in cell, he [Taylor] was critical about what he called unwarranted vigilance and the arrest of drug traffickers in Ghana. I begged to differ from him but he insisted that the major concern of African governments should be the prevention of domestic consumption of hard drugs. Once people are exporting such drugs from Africa, they should be allowed. He further stressed that we should think of cultivating coca and marijuana in Ghana as major exports. He was particularly peeved about the fact that African governments complain of lack of capital when they have the easy option of granting banking facilities to drug barons who have billions of dollars for laundering.'<sup>65</sup>

Such a view could be heard on many street corners and executive offices in West Africa, and they inform a widespread admiration for the exploits and wealth of notorious drug traffickers, some of who engage in important philanthropic and community development schemes. As we shall see below, the view provides the context in which drug traffickers and dealers operate with near-impunity in many communities in West Africa.

---

<sup>60</sup> Report of the Secretary-General on transnational organized crime and illicit drug trafficking in West Africa and the Sahel region (S/2013/359 17 June 2013).

<sup>61</sup> Author's interview with Yaw Akrassi-Sarpong, the Executive Secretary of Ghana's Narcotics Control Board, in Accra on 21 April 2011, who said: "We have the highest convictions rate for narcotics-related offences in the region." He added that the same approach ought to be taken regionally, since law-enforcement mechanisms are extremely weak in neighbouring Francophone countries, aiding trafficking from those countries into Ghana and elsewhere in the region.

<sup>62</sup> Cited in the *Daily Graphic* (Accra), 21 April 2011.

<sup>63</sup> Author's interview with Yaw Akrassi-Sarpong (Accra, April 2011)

<sup>64</sup> See: 'Cables Portray Expanded Reach of Drug Agency,' *New York Times*, 25 December 2010

<sup>65</sup> Stephen Ellis, 'West Africa's International Drug Trade.'

## 6 Infiltration of the Security and Financial Systems

In situations where the political leadership is not overtly or directly involved in drug trafficking, traffickers must be guaranteed the collaboration of law enforcement agencies and the banking sector to be able to operate effectively. This situation appears to be more prevalent than the former, though the two situations are often mutually supportive, and there is a substantial body of evidence in this regard.

Recent high-profile trial and conviction of leading police chiefs in several West African countries reveal the extent to which drug traffickers have penetrated state security, thereby suggesting that drug trafficking through the region has become more sophisticated and probably even routinised somewhat. In January 2013, for example, a Special Criminal Court in The Gambia sentenced Ensa Bajie, the former Inspector General of Police to a 10-year jail term. After his arrest in 2009 Bajie claimed that he had been facilitating drug trafficking and sale on behalf of President Yahya Jammeh. He was reportedly tortured during his incarceration.<sup>66</sup>

In neighbouring Senegal, in July 2013 the chief of police and former drug control agent, Abdoulaye Niang, was sacked on suspicion of involvement in drug trafficking. He is still under investigation.<sup>67</sup> Senegal is one of the most important transit points for the smuggling of cocaine to Europe.

### 6.1 Ghana

With respect to Ghana, the charges against Adelaquaye illustrate in significant detail the method of penetration of both private and public internal security services allegedly used by traffickers. Adelaquaye's charge sheet, read in a Manhattan court by US prosecutor Preet Bharara on 9 May 2013, stated that "[f]rom at least in or about January 2012, up to and including in or about May 2013," Adelaquaye and his foreign co-conspirators – Colombian Samuel Antonia Pinedo-Rueda and Nigerians Frank Muodum and Celestine Ofor – "intentionally and knowingly did combine, conspire, confederate, and agree together and with each other to violate the narcotics laws of the United States." They are held to have developed an elaborate plan, encouraged by US undercover agents, to smuggle heroin into the US. The American-led investigation culminating in their arrest lasted for over a year. US agents, under the cover of drug dealers, held several meetings with the accused over the period. They paid Adelaquaye thousands of dollars to facilitate the smuggling through Kotoka Airport. At one meeting in Adelaquaye's office at the airport (25 February 2012), a US agent told the airport security chief that he had hidden 1 kg of heroin inside his laptop, and that he would like that laptop to be smuggled onto a plane. Adelaquaye told the agent to give the computer to an

---

<sup>66</sup> See: '10 Years For Ensa Badjie,' *Jollof News*, 22 January 2013 <http://www.jollofnews.com/human-rights/3719-10-years-for-ensa-badjie-> (accessed n 28 July 2013). See also US State Department *Human Rights Report 2011* on the Gambia for allegations that the police chief was tortured in detention; found at <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/186411.pdf> (accessed on 28 July 2013). The Gambian gained international headlines in May 2010 when its, and British, officials seized two tonnes of cocaine with a street value of around a billion dollars. Twelve people of various nationalities were arrested after investigators discovered the drugs in an underground bunker in a warehouse outside the Gambian capital, Banjul. Those arrested included Europeans, Nigerians, Ghanaians, Gambians and other nationals. In October 2011, eight foreigners were sentenced to 50 years each in prison for trying to smuggle the cocaine from Latin America to Europe through the Gambia.

<sup>67</sup> See 'Senegal police chief sacked over drug trafficking claims,' *AFP* July 26 2013; found at: <http://www.africareview.com/News/Senegal-police-chief-sacked-over-drug-trafficking/-/979180/1927482/-/grbq2o/-/index.html> (accessed on 29 July 2013)

associate of his who would take it inside the plane; the agent gave Adelaquaye US \$6000 in cash, with a promise of further payments once the laptop arrived in New York. The agents also paid Orjinweke, the Nigerian, US \$28,000 in Accra on 22 February 2012 for supplying the heroin; he received an additional US \$4,000 once the drugs arrived at their destination. All parties – the US agents, Adelaquaye, the Nigerians and the Colombians – worked closely together through the year, according to the indictment.<sup>68</sup>

While this case, which is the result of a sting operation, is still pending trial, the preliminary hearings indicate how easy it is for drug traffickers with huge amounts of cash at their disposal to penetrate the underfunded and often corrupt bureaucracies in charge of security, including airport security, in West Africa. A far more important and well-known case of state security penetration by drug traffickers in Ghana happened in 2006.

On 21 April 2006, Ghana's Narcotics Control Board (NACOB) was tipped by British and American intelligence that a drug-laden ship was headed towards its port at Tema. Four days after this information, NACOB alerted the Ghanaian navy and airforce, which, the following day, carried out air reconnaissance but its officers reported that they were unable to locate the ship. The vessel – the MV Benjamin – was finally located on the 27 April, six days after information about it was passed on the authorities, at Tema. By the time it was searched, only one of some 77 parcels of cocaine believed to be on board was found. The value of the 'lost' cocaine was estimated at hundreds of millions of dollars. The government instituted a commission of inquiry headed by Chief Justice Georgina Wood to determine two things: what happened to the missing 76 parcels of cocaine; and whether senior police officers were bribed to cover-up the missing drugs, as was widely believed.<sup>69</sup> The Wood inquiry found that the vessel had docked on 26 April, a day before NACOB officials found it, and that "two canoes with armed men, who from the evidence appeared to be fishermen, collected seventy-six sacks of the cocaine." The men in the canoe delivered the sacks of cocaine to the owners, one Asem Darkeh Sheriff and Kwak Seong *aka* 'Killer', a Korean, "into a waiting vehicle and [were] driven away to an unknown destination."<sup>70</sup> The inquiry determined that it found "no evidence that security operatives or personnel of the Ghana Police" in any way "aided them in the importation or discharge" of the drugs. It did, however, find that a detective sergeant, Yaw Amoah, assisted one of the traffickers, Sheriff, to escape after he was paid \$3000.<sup>71</sup>

The inquiry addressed a controversial issue relating to the MV Benjamin case: a meeting held during the investigations at the house of Kofi Boakye, the Director-General of operations at the Ghana National Police. This meeting was, curiously enough, recorded, and from the recording of the discussions, the Wood inquiry was able to establish "acts of corruption, abuse of office, professional misconduct and unsatisfactory service" on the part of Boakye. The inquiry held that Boakye conspired with others to aid the drug traffickers. He was sent on leave but was subsequently cleared of any wrong doing by the police council. The Committee found that drug trafficking "has taken root in Ghana" and that "sadly, the country is gaining notoriety as a transit point for drug trafficking" posing "a real threat to the stability and security of the

---

<sup>68</sup> See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-22780761> (accessed on 25 July 2013).

<sup>69</sup> Georgina Wood Report: Commission of Inquiry into the MV Benjamin Case, Government of Ghana (2007), pp.1. For the MV Benjamin case, see also Aning *et al's* case study in Kavanagh ed., (2013), *Getting Smart and Scaling Up*, found at [http://cic.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/kavanagh\\_crime\\_developing\\_countries\\_ghana\\_study.pdf](http://cic.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/kavanagh_crime_developing_countries_ghana_study.pdf)

<sup>70</sup> Ibid

<sup>71</sup> Ibid

State.”<sup>72</sup> It recommended that the top political leadership of the country take the lead in fighting trafficking and called for the setting up of “a well resourced Special Court equipped to expeditiously dispose of all drug related cases,” and “a new crop of police personnel imbued with a high sense of discipline, nationalism and patriotism is urgently needed for the country.”<sup>73</sup>

Though the inquiry recommended the prosecution of Boakye, the Kuffour government never charged him. In July 2008, five of those who were placed on trial, including the owners of the vessels and the junior police detective, were handed a total of 125-years in jail with hard labour by an Accra Fast Track High Court.<sup>74</sup> A leaked US embassy cable later quoted the American ambassador in Ghana at the time of the inquiry, Pamela E. Bridgewater, as saying that Boakye was not prosecuted because he probably had “some incriminating information” on other highly-placed people in the security services and the government which he could have divulged in court.<sup>75</sup> In fact the incriminating tape recording of the meeting at Boakye’s house, which was played by radio stations in Ghana, seemed to implicate important government officials and a highly exalted traditional ruler, who was very influential in the government at the time, in drug trafficking.<sup>76</sup>

## 6.2 Sierra Leone

More poignant still were the revelations made during the aforementioned 2008 cocaine trial in Sierra Leone. The trial judgment provided a singular insight into the range of networks meticulously built by the traffickers in Sierra Leone preceding the landing of the cocaine plane in 2008.<sup>77</sup> The networks included government officials, top security agents, businessmen, the setting up of fake NGOs and a fake mining company, safe houses in the interior of the country (Port Loko), and young people, including students, co-opted into the operation. The judgment noted that the Central Intelligence and Security Unit (CISU), the country’s chief intelligence agency, as well as the Special Branch of the police in charge of serious criminal cases, “had become penetrated institutions, accepting shop-worn wares as good intelligence”, adding that the two branches of security “may have to review their recruiting policies and control systems of their agents if there is to be any change.”<sup>78</sup>

---

<sup>72</sup>Georgina Wood Report, pp. 9.

<sup>73</sup>Georgina Wood Report, pp. 12.

<sup>74</sup> They were Joseph Kojo Dawson, owner of the vessel and Managing Director of Dashment Company Limited; Isaac Arhin, sailor; Phillip Bruce Arhin, mechanic (all of these Ghanaians). Cui Xian Li, the vessel engineer and Luo Yui Xing, sailor, both Chinese, were also convicted. ‘125 years for 5 coke dealers, in MV Benjamin case,’ *Ghanaian Times*, 28 July 2008

<sup>75</sup>“WikiLeaks: Kofi Boakye Holds Cocaine Dossier”, Ghanaweb, 12 September 2011; found at: <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/artikel.php?ID=218517> (accessed on 25 July 2013).

<sup>76</sup>US Embassy cables leaked in 2010 revealed increasing anxiety among Western officials about the level of John Kuffour’s government commitment in combating the drug problem. One, dated 28 June 2007, noted that Ben Botwe, who took over from Major-General Richardson Baiden as the Acting Executive Director of Ghana’s Narcotics Control Board (NCB) that year, lacked “security or law enforcement experience and we question whether he has the political weight or support to make an impact in his new job.” The cables quoted Botwe as saying that narcotics “shipments are happening,” although he was not sure why they are coming to Ghana. Another cable, dated 5 August 2008, reported an American official asking Botwe about “the recent seizure of a large shipment of cocaine that originated in Guinea.” The cable noted that “the shipment was stopped outside of Accra by police, but other than the three individuals in the vehicle, no arrests have been made. Botwe and his officials agreed that more patience in conducting investigations was needed in order to arrest those higher up in trafficking circles. He cited the need for better cooperation among Ghanaian law enforcement organizations.”

<sup>77</sup> See Sierra Leone case study by Walker in Kavanagh et al (2013), *Getting Smart and Scaling Up*.

<sup>78</sup> Sierra Leone Judiciary, *THE STATE AND GEROGÉ ARITSTIZABEL ARCHILLA and 17 Others*, pp. 22.

Leaked US diplomatic cables from the Embassy in Freetown in 2009, revealed American anxiety about what diplomats had described as “the reactive and somewhat ramshackle investigation” that tended to follow the arrest of the drug traffickers. The cables noted that it “was alleged by one of the defense attorneys that the foreigners had paid a 75,000 Euro bribe to the judge for a more lenient sentencing.”<sup>79</sup> The Attorney-General and Minister of Justice, Serry Kamal, was alleged to have made a deal with the detained South Americans to give him US \$2.5 million in exchange for their quiet release. The cables, however, concluded that despite “Sierra Leone's general lack of capacity and infrastructure, the collaborative efforts between the President and the judicial and security sectors to bring this case to a strong and dramatic conclusion demonstrates that political will exists ... to effectively combat the issue.”<sup>80</sup>

Political will on the part of the chief executive in combating the drug menace is doubtless very important, not least in terms of how it translates into resource allocation, developing institutional capacity and responsiveness. The banking sector in the region, for example, appears to be particularly vulnerable to money laundering and forms of organised crime such as drug trafficking. According to the US State Department *Money Laundering Report 2012*, almost every country in West Africa – most of them cash-based economies - suffers from this problem. Comments in the country reports on Ghana, Guinea, Sierra Leone and Nigeria are typical. For example, on Ghana it notes that the country “is becoming an important regional financial center, including for illicit financial activity. Most of the money laundering in Ghana involves narcotics, various forms of fraud, and public corruption. Criminals launder illicit proceeds through investments in banking, insurance, real estate, automotive and general.” On Guinea, the report notes that the country “is a known hub for packaging and distribution of narcotics in West Africa. It is widely suspected that the lack of record keeping, weak law enforcement, corruption, and the informal cash-based economy provide a fertile environment for other illegal activities that are predicate offenses for money laundering.” With respect to Nigeria, it notes that the country “remains a major drug transshipment point and a significant center for criminal financial activity... The proceeds of illicit drugs in Nigeria derive largely from foreign criminal activity rather than domestic activity. One of the schemes used by drug traffickers to repatriate and launder their proceeds involves the importation of various commodities, predominantly luxury goods...” Meanwhile, Sierra Leone “is not a regional financial center. Loose oversight of financial institutions, weak regulations, a large seaport, pervasive corruption, and porous borders make it conducive to money laundering. Sierra Leone is a potentially attractive trans-sea shipment point for illegal drugs or other forms of illegal commerce.”<sup>81</sup>

### 6.3 Liberia

Even more than Sierra Leone, Liberia was devastated by well over a decade of internal conflict; the state collapsed, and became highly criminalized under President Charles Taylor’s leadership from 1997 to 2003. Despite a range of initiatives to bolster the criminal justice system, the judicial and law enforcement agencies in the country remain largely ineffective; and anti-narcotics laws are barely enforced. The Liberian Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA)

---

<sup>79</sup> ‘Cables Portray Expanded Reach of Drug Agency,’ *New York Times*, 25 December 2010

<sup>80</sup> Ibid

<sup>81</sup> See: <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/211396.pdf> (accessed on 25 July 2013). ECOWAS’ Intergovernmental Action Group Against Money Laundering in West Africa (GIABA) has been looking at the issue closely for many years now. Its May 2010 report, entitled *Corruption–Money Laundering Nexus: An Analysis of Risks and Control Measures in West Africa*, noted the growing evidence of laundering of drug profits in the region, especially in the property market.

persistently complains that when drug traffickers are arrested and sent to court, they are quickly released on payment of negligible fines of Lib. \$3000 (about USD \$400).

US anti-drugs officials have, however have been very active in the country supporting the country's National Security Agency (NSA), which, under Fumbah Sirleaf, the son of the President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, has successfully collaborated with American agents on a number of major sting operations. The first of these operations took place in May 2010, when traffickers attempted to bribe Fumbah Sirleaf US \$400,000 to allow 700 kilos of cocaine to land safely in Liberia. Instead, Sirleaf alerted the President and US authorities. That same month, US and Liberian authorities arrested a number of people suspected of drug trafficking in Monrovia, extradited them to the US to stand trial, marking the first defendant-transfer by the Liberian government to the US in connection with narcotics-related charges in over 30 years. Those arrested included a Russian pilot, a Nigerian narcotics broker, a Colombian cocaine supplier and a Ghanaian maritime expert with the kind of expertise in sea routes needed to evade law-enforcement radar. Another of the defendants and his associates were part-owners of a large commercial airline operating in the region. The alleged traffickers were suspected of intending to use passenger flights departing from Monrovia to move cocaine out of the country.<sup>82</sup>

These efforts do not, however seem to have deterred traffickers. For example, between January and September 2013, the Liberian DEA seized 24 kilograms of heroin and 1.5 kilograms of cocaine from passengers aboard commercial aircraft flying into Liberia. Senior diplomatic sources told the author in early October that these seizures likely only represent a fraction of the actual volume of the narcotics trafficked through Liberia; or increasingly available in the country for local consumption. Western diplomats interviewed in September 2013 expressed the view that Liberia's weak security and political economy challenges are being taken advantage of by international drugs-traffickers who are gaining a foothold despite several successful counter-narcotics efforts, according to close observers of the scene.

Conversely, in September 2013, two former soldiers, one US citizen and a German, were arrested in a sting operation after plotting to assassinate a local US DEA agent and an informant. They are now in New York awaiting trial. In August Johnson-Sirleaf dismissed Albert Chelley, the Deputy Director for Operations of Liberia's Drug Enforcement Agency, for "serious violations of the policies and ethics of the Government." Chelley had conspired with Nigerian drug traffickers to smuggle heroin through Liberia. On two occasions, he prevented the arrest of drug-smugglers. Despite Chelley's removal, American and European diplomats remain deeply concerned about corruption in Liberia's security agencies. They believe the national intelligence service - the National Security Agency- has been penetrated at a high level, and that several leading Nigerian drugs-traffickers have for that reason based themselves in Monrovia, supervising heroin and methamphetamine transshipments from Lagos to Europe and the US.<sup>83</sup>

## 7 Terrorist Networks and Military Coups

In February 2012 the UN Security Council issued a Presidential Statement recognising "the serious threats to international peace and stability in different regions (...), in particular in West Africa and the Sahel Region, posed by transnational organised crime, including illicit weapons and drug trafficking, piracy and armed robbery at sea, as well as terrorism and its

---

<sup>82</sup>Benjamin Weiser and William K. Rashbaum, 'Liberia Aids US in Drugs Fight,' New York Times 1 June 2010.

<sup>83</sup>See "Liberia: Feted and Berated," *Africa Confidential* Vol 54 No 22.



increasing links, in some cases, with transnational organised crime and drug trafficking.”<sup>84</sup> The statement followed a high-level debate, organised by Togo, on the impact of transnational organised crime on peace and security in West Africa and the wider Sahel region.

Emblematised primarily by events in Mali and the broader Sahel in 2012, the significance of the involvement of terrorist and extremist networks in drug trafficking for the rest of West Africa is uncertain. On 22 March 2012, young officers, led by Capt. Amadou Sanogo, overthrew the civilian government of Malian President Amadou Toumani Touré, ahead of presidential elections scheduled for 29 April in which Touré was not participating. The soldiers had abandoned a faltering campaign against Tuareg rebels in the north of the country. The Tuareg, under the banner of the Mouvement national pour la libération de l’Azawad (MNLA), seized the northern half of the country and declared it independent of Mali shortly after the coup. The situation was further complicated by the strong presence among the Tuareg of members of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), which by July 2012 had gained ascendancy and effectively sidelined MNLA in its territorial claims. AQIM—and its ally, the Islamist group Ansar Eddine—imposed a regime of terror in the vast area, including extrajudicial killings, the destruction of historic monuments in Timbuktu, and the oppression of women, triggering the flight of an estimated quarter of the population.

The Mali coup took the world, which had supported the notion of a stable and democratic Mali, by surprise. Subsequent investigations, however, showed that the respected Touré had presided over and fostered a corrupt government, also complicit in drug trafficking. Credible reports have since emerged, for example, that government ministers and senior army and intelligence officers close to President Touré were involved in the infamous botched landing of a Boeing 727 that had originated in Venezuela and was carrying an estimated five to nine tonnes of cocaine at Tarkint, near Gao in northeast Mali, in November 2009.<sup>85</sup> The reports suggested that it was partly because the junior officers, unlike the senior ones close to the president, lacked access to the drug money that they staged the coup.<sup>86</sup> Some reports have also implicated the Islamist and Tuareg groups, which had seized control of northern Mali in 2012, in the drug trade before French forces dislodged them. AQIM and the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) were said to provide protection to cocaine convoys that cross their territory in return for huge payments. They were believed not to have otherwise actively participated in drug trafficking, since they made most of their money from hostage taking.<sup>87</sup>

Some analysts, mainly North American, have since suggested that Hezbollah and AQIM have become involved in drug trafficking through the Sahel, earning them millions of dollars which they use to finance terrorist operations on the continent and elsewhere.<sup>88</sup> Conversely, in a recent paper also commissioned by the WACD, Wolfram Lacher, a North Africa expert at the

---

<sup>84</sup>Security Council Report, UNOWA (West Africa), Monthly Forecast, July 2012 (found at: [http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2012-07/lookup\\_c\\_glKWLeMTIsG\\_b\\_8192001.php](http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2012-07/lookup_c_glKWLeMTIsG_b_8192001.php)); accessed on 20 July 2013.

<sup>85</sup> See: Abdelkader Abderrahmane, ‘West Africa: Drug Trafficking and the Crisis in Mali,’ Institute for Security Studies, 6 August 2012; found at: <http://allafrica.com/stories/201208060367.html?page=2> (accessed on 27 July 2013).

<sup>86</sup> See, for example, Anne Frintz, ‘Boots on the ground in the Sahel’, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, 3 February 2013; found at: <http://mondediplo.com/2013/02/03drugs> (accessed 24 July 2013)

<sup>87</sup> Anne Frintz, ‘Boots on the ground in the Sahel’; and also Abdelkader Abderrahmane, ‘West Africa: Drug Trafficking and the Crisis in Mali,’ Institute for Security Studies.

<sup>88</sup> David E. Brown, The Challenge of Drug Trafficking to Democratic Governance and Human Security in West Africa; and David O’Regan, ‘Narco-States: Africa’s Next Menace,’ New York Times op-ed, 12 March 2012.

German Institute for International and Security Affairs in Berlin, has sounded a cautionary note on the now-widespread reports alleging that AQIM and MUJAO are ‘narco-jihadists’. Lacher argues that though these groups have been and will most likely continue to be involved in drug smuggling, the latter is just one of a range of illicit activities they engage in, and the existence of a “drug-terror nexus” in West Africa and the Sahel and on the scale it has been reported is misleading for several reasons. Indeed, he argues, “rather than the two extremist groups as such, involvement in drug trafficking appears to concern individuals and groups close to, or within, MUJAO and AQIM: within both groups, members are driven by multiple and, at times, conflicting motivations.” In any case, numerous other players, who have no link to such groups, “are playing an equally or more important role in drug smuggling, including members of the political and business establishment in northern Mali Niger and the region’s capitals, as well as leaders of supposedly ‘secular’ armed groups.” All that the emphasis on narco-jihadism does, Lacher argues, is “obscure the role of state actors and corruption in allowing organized crime to take root and grow.”<sup>89</sup>

## 8 Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings discussed in this paper relating to the participation of important West African political actors and security officials in drug trafficking, and the impact of their involvement on their countries, are preliminary. Only a few countries in which important data is available on the issue are considered, and some more than others. But the findings provide a startling insight into the threats posed by drug trafficking to the stability, not to mention governance, of many states in West Africa. It is important to note, however, that in several cases – particularly Ghana, Sierra Leone, the Gambia and Senegal – the state has made important efforts, often with the support of external partners, to resist this threat through law-enforcement efforts. The problem is that these efforts are mainly reactive, and as discussed above, there have been very few clear resolutions in the many important cases dealt with at national level. Perhaps more important, local or regional efforts have been significantly aided, indeed in some cases initiated, by foreign governments and their agencies, whose agendas in the longer term may not coincide with those of the West African states they are at present assisting.

An important point to consider, as the authors of an important new study<sup>90</sup> underlined, is the fact that in none of the cases in which important political leaders have been found to be complicit in drug trafficking have such leaders faced serious consequences; no minister or parliamentarian whose involvement in drug trafficking has been exposed has faced jail terms in the sub-region.<sup>91</sup> Those that have been arrested have generally been extradited to other jurisdictions where they are tried and sentenced. Some indeed have been protected by their presidents or similar and, after their initial disgrace, reinstated. In other cases, the lack of specialization within the police and the judiciary has meant that due process was not followed

---

<sup>89</sup> Wolfram Lacher, *Challenging the Myth of the Drug-Terror Nexus in the Sahel: WACD Background Paper No.4* (found at: <http://www.wacommissionondrugs.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Challenging-the-Myth-of-the-Drug-Terror-Nexus-in-the-Sahel-2013-08-19.pdf>) accessed on 22 August 2013.

<sup>90</sup> Kavanagh ed., (2013), *Getting Smart and Scaling Up Responding to the Impact of Organized Crime on Governance in Developing Countries*, NYU Center on International Cooperation.

<sup>91</sup>The delicious fantasy of the Ghanaian writer Arthur Kobina Kennedy, in an interesting novel published in 2012, had a sitting West African President arraigned in court for drug trafficking, but that court is in “faraway The Hague.” This is because, the president of the court coyly says, it “is reasonable to suppose that if HIS EXCELLENCY had been served with a summons to this court in his capital and was free to decide whether he would honour the summons or not, he would not be here.” See Kennedy, *The Drug Invasion of West Africa* (Cape Coast: UCC Press, 2012), 194.

and cases consequently dismissed. Generally, only lower-level officials have faced the criminal justice system after successful drug interdictions. In some cases, it is users who receive the brunt of the law, often under dire circumstances. This situation enhances the sense of impunity with regard to major political players, and certainly undercuts the ostensible efforts to combat the multiple challenges posed by drug trafficking. It may also have a long-lasting effect on the legitimacy of institutions vis-à-vis citizens. Hence, a number of important steps need to be taken to change the current trajectory:

### 8.1 Preventive measures

Preventive measures could include developing more effective mechanisms for the funding of political parties, and developing the capacity of different actors to monitor their sources of funding – the two should be considered as a package. In the absence of such funding mechanisms, political actors may avail of the financial proceeds from drug trafficking to support electoral campaigns and underwrite voter turnout. This will doubtless make drug trafficking more and more attractive, particularly for opposition parties – which by definition in West Africa have limited access to legitimate finance – an appropriate resort.

Some electoral systems in West Africa, such as Liberia's, require asset disclosure by presidential candidates, but since there is no mechanism to verify such a procedure, and no ceiling on campaign spending or restrictions on campaign fund-raising, the requirement is perfunctory. Similarly, in many West African countries, elected officials are obliged to disclose their assets upon taking office so as to safeguard against personal enrichment while in office. Again, limited effort is made to implement such provisions, and in many cases the absence or weakness of access to information legislation does not facilitate monitoring by civil society. These lacunae in legislation and enforcement and monitoring mechanisms should be urgently addressed.

### 8.2 Mobilizing political commitment and citizen interest

Emphasis should be placed on mobilizing the commitment of regional governments at the highest levels to publicly acknowledge the governance risks posed by drug trafficking in the region. In this regard, they should commit to ensuring that the relevant national agencies have adequate resources to effectively respond to drug trafficking, and that the justice system is protected from political interference regardless of who has been implicated in the drug trade.

Inter-party-dialogue on the risks posed by drug trafficking should be encouraged and steps taken to implement provisions in regional instruments regarding the protection of electoral processes from illicit funding.<sup>92</sup> Again, political leaders and parties should be held to account if they cannot provide an account of their assets and sources of party and election campaign funding. The latter should be clearly spelt out and integrated into each country's legislative framework.

**Involving anti-corruption agencies, as well as civil society groups and the media in oversight efforts in this regard** is imperative; such groups need to be aware of the issues, and provided with the tools and safety nets required for their effective involvement.

---

<sup>92</sup> Ref. Praia Declaration

### 8.3 Strengthening capacity

A recent programming guide developed by United States Agency for International Development (USAID) noted that in the absence of a strong local political commitment to combating drug trafficking in West Africa, international development partners could influence regional governments by enhancing capacity to respond to drug trafficking.<sup>93</sup> This could include more participative discussions on whether and how to domesticate international anti-narcotics conventions and treaties, as well as bolstering current efforts to strengthen criminal justice systems, harmonize drug-related legislation across the sub-region, while simultaneously ensuring that effective and humane treatment is provided to drug users.

Again, such measures must perforce involve bolstering the capacity of the judiciary and the police in specialized areas, while also ensuring their independence from political interference, so as to ensure that those detained on drug-trafficking related charges go through a transparent process. This, of course, requires the commitment of the region's political leadership and the effective allocation of resources. The analysis of drug-trafficking cases that have already been tried in the region can help map out existing problems and expose loopholes to be addressed. It can also establish precedent or case law, upon which future judgements will be based.

### 8.4 Awareness Raising

Finally, it is important that the West African public become more aware of the pernicious effect of drug trafficking on their societies and the role civil society can play in preventing it from taking root. A public awareness campaign, showing that West Africa is no longer just a transit point for hard drugs but increasingly a major consumer of dangerous and harmful drugs emanating principally from foreign countries<sup>94</sup> and benefitting mainly outsiders or national elites, may go a long way.<sup>95</sup> Evidence of the health problems caused by the drugs should be widely publicized as part of this campaign.

---

<sup>93</sup>USAID, *The Development Response to Drug Trafficking in Africa: A Programming Guide* (April 2013); found at: [http://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1860/Development\\_Response\\_to\\_Drug\\_Trafficking\\_in\\_Africa\\_Programming\\_Guide.pdf](http://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1860/Development_Response_to_Drug_Trafficking_in_Africa_Programming_Guide.pdf) (accessed on 20 August 2013).

<sup>94</sup> In fact, according to the 17 June 2013 *Report of the Secretary-General on transnational organized crime and illicit drug trafficking in West Africa and the Sahel region* (cited above) between 2010 and 2013, three methamphetamine laboratories were discovered in Nigeria, noting that similar labs may be operating in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana. The report notes a "sharp increase in recent years in the number of West Africans arrested for trafficking methamphetamine to East Asia", citing the figure of an estimated 1,500 air couriers trafficked around 1.5 metric tons of methamphetamine from West Africa to East Asia in 2010, generating gross revenues of about \$90 million.

<sup>95</sup>The Georgina Wood's inquiry report in Ghana in 2007 underlined this point, noting the following: "The Committee finds that all GHANAIANS must be involved in the war against the drug trade. In this regard, the Committee recommends that the threat the drug trade poses to the governance of the country, to the peace and security of the nation and to the country's richest resource- the youth- must be widely publicised. The MINISTRIES OF EDUCATION, INFORMATION & NATIONAL ORIENTATION must seriously take up the challenge concerning the youth." (pp. 11).