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**Boston University** The Frederick S. Pardee Center  
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# Narcotics Trafficking in West Africa: A Governance Challenge

Peter L. McGuire

## **Abstract**

*West Africa is one of the most impoverished, underdeveloped, and instability-prone regions in the world. Many of the nation-states in the region are empirically weak: they lack the capacity to deliver public goods and services to their citizens, do not claim effective control over their territories, are marked by high levels of official corruption, and are plagued by political instability and violent conflict. Since 2004 the region has faced an unprecedented surge in illicit narcotics (primarily cocaine) trafficking, raising fears within the international community that foreign (largely South American) trafficking groups would engender escalated corruption and violence across the region. This paper examines the effect that the surge in narcotics trafficking has had on governance and security in the region, paying particular attention to the experience of Guinea-Bissau and neighboring Republic of Guinea (Guinea-Conakry), two West African states that have been particularly affected by the illicit trade. The central argument presented is that narcotics trafficking is only one facet of the overall challenge of state weakness and fragility in the region. The profound weakness of many West African states has enabled foreign trafficking groups to develop West Africa into an entrepôt for cocaine destined for the large and profitable European market, sometimes with the active facilitation of high-level state actors. Thus, simply implementing counter-narcotics initiatives in the region will have a limited impact without a long-term commitment to strengthening state capacity, improving political transparency and accountability, and tackling poverty alleviation and underdevelopment. Without addressing the root issues that allowed for the penetration of trafficking groups into the states of the region in the first place, West Africa will remain susceptible to similar situations in the future, undermining the region's nascent progress in the realms of governance, security, and development.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Since 2004 there has been an unprecedented surge in the amount of cocaine being trafficked through the West African region.<sup>1</sup> Between 2005 and 2008, 46 metric tons (mt) of cocaine destined for the Western European market were seized by law-enforcement officials in or around West Africa, where only years before annual seizures of over one ton for the entire African continent were rare (UNODC 2008b, 3). Regional and international observers have expressed serious concerns that the sudden rise in trafficking will undermine the rule of law, encourage corruption, sow political instability and violence, and corrode state capacity across the region (U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee 2009; UNODC 2007b; de Andres 2008). Antonio Maria Costa, the executive director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) argues that West African states “...risk becoming shell-states: sovereign in name, but hollowed out from the inside by criminals in collusion with corrupt officials in the government and the security services...”(UNODC 2008b, 1). Similarly, Antonio L. Mazzitelli warns that failing to adequately respond to the threat of transnational organized crime in the region could “...result in the emergence of a number of pariah states ruled under faked democratic processes and serving as safe havens for all kinds of fugitive criminals...” and “...the appetite for quick and easy money accessible through criminal ventures may lead to *coups d'état* and long-lasting civil conflicts” (Mazzitelli 2007, 1088).

The sudden rise in cocaine trafficking through West Africa indisputably has negative implications for governance, security, and development in the region. It is, however, crucial to recognize that cocaine trafficking is not a *cause* of state fragility and political corruption but is rather a *symptom* of the pre-existence of these conditions in West Africa. In this sense, the central question facing domestic, regional, and international policy-makers concerned with drug smuggling and criminality in West Africa is not necessarily how to confront these challenges specifically, but how to encourage and aid the development of overall state effectiveness and legitimacy across the region.

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1. For the purposes of this paper the West African region is considered to be the 16 member states of the Economic Community of West African States: Togo, Benin, Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Gambia, Guinea-Conakry, Guinea-Bissau, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Côte d'Ivoire, and Cape Verde.

**Figure 1: West Africa**



*Source: United Nations, Department of Peacekeeping Operations. Map No. 4045 Rev.4, January 2004*

The goal of this paper is to provide a preliminary view of the impact that cocaine trafficking has had on governance, security, and development within West Africa's weakest states. Before continuing, it is important to outline some of the limitations inherent in researching clandestine trade and informal politics. Research on political corruption, narcotics trafficking, and criminality is limited by its necessarily clandestine nature. Rumor, suspicion, and conspiracy dominate accounts of criminal-political activity, and I have attempted to verify received information to the extent possible. The inherent limitations to this research are apparent, and the conclusions reached should be interpreted cautiously.

The paper is organized into five sections. The first section provides a brief assessment of some of the structural and political weaknesses evident in states across West Africa and the role that organized crime plays in exacerbating these weaknesses. The following section outlines the history of narcotics trafficking through the region and sheds some light on the reasons for the recent surge in cocaine trafficking since 2004. Then brief case studies focus on Guinea-Bissau and the Republic of Guinea (Guinea-Conakry), two West African states that have experienced serious effects from the cocaine

trade. Finally, the paper concludes with some cautious suggestions for future policies to enable West Africa's weakest states to confront this current challenge and develop the capacity and integrity to adequately confront similar challenges in the future.

## **DYNAMICS OF STATE WEAKNESS AND ORGANIZED CRIME IN WEST AFRICA**

Long considered a primarily domestic problem with limited international impact, the issues of state weakness and failure gained prominence in academic and policy circles shortly following the September 11 terrorist attacks (Patrick 2006, 27). State weakness and failure is now considered a threat to national and international security, and weak/failed states are often seen as incubators for international security threats such as transnational terrorism; organized crime; nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons proliferation; and contagious disease transmission (Patrick 2006, 33). International efforts have consequently focused on strengthening weak states and resuscitating failed states across the world, in the hope that strong, efficient, and accountable states will be able to stave off the transnational threats they are believed to incubate.

While state weakness and failure is a relative concept in that no two states are ever exactly the same, there are some general attributes and indicators that point to the severity of weakness in a given state. All too often, state weakness and failure is overly associated with widespread armed conflict (Rotberg 2002). Intra-state war is certainly an indicator of state failure, but an over-emphasis on violence overshadows other variables that contribute to profound state weakness and fragility. A recent index on state weakness written by Susan E. Rice and Stewart Patrick offers a more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon by ranking states according to their capacity to deliver public services. Consequently, the authors define weak states as those that "...lack the essential capacity and/or will to fulfill four sets of critical government responsibilities: fostering an environment conducive to sustainable and equitable economic growth; establishing and maintaining legitimate, transparent, and accountable political institutions; securing their populations from violent conflict and controlling their territory; and meeting the basic human needs of their population" (Rice and Patrick 2008, 3). In

the conclusion to their report, Rice and Patrick also found that state weakness is directly related to poverty, stating that “On balance, poorer countries tend to be weaker ones. Poverty fuels and perpetuates civil conflict, which swiftly and dramatically reduces state capacity” (Rice and Patrick 2008, 22). State weakness is therefore contingent on the capacity and will of a state to deliver essential public goods to their citizens, including economic opportunities, basic security, accountable governance, and social services. While weak, failing, and failed states are found in every region across the globe, the African continent has been particularly marked by state weakness, leading some observers to claim that “...state failure is a broadly African phenomenon” (Englebert and Tull 2008, 108). While most of the continent is fragile, state weakness is especially pronounced in West Africa.

West Africa is one of the poorest, least developed, and instability-prone regions in the world. The United Nations Development Program ranks 13 out of the 16 countries in the West African region as “low human development” and fully half of the states in the region are in the bottom 15 countries (UNDP 2009). Clearly, many West African states have proved to be unable to offer appreciable levels of development to their citizens. Exacerbating this dismal level of economic and human develop-

ment has been the unstable and often violent politics of the region. Since West African states gained independence from European colonial powers in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the region’s political systems have been characterized by repressive authoritarian regimes, military coups and coup attempts, and

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bloody civil conflict.<sup>2</sup> Within the region, only Cape Verde has been free of military intervention in domestic politics since independence, while the region overall has witnessed an astonishing 44 successful coups and

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2. The majority of West African states were independent from their former colonial powers, (principally Britain and France) by the early 1960s, with the exception of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, which did not gain full independence from Portugal until the mid 1970s.

43 failed coup attempts between 1955 and 2004 (McGowan 2006, 236). In the post-colonial period, West African states have been dominated by single-party authoritarian regimes characterized by repression, systematic corruption, nepotism, and gross economic mismanagement (N'Diaye, Saine, and Houngnikpo 2005, 181–183). West Africa also has experienced periods of intense armed conflict, notably the regional conflict in the Mano River basin that included Liberia, Sierra Leone, and their neighbors. Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, and Senegal have also had civil conflict (Sawyer 2004). These conflicts have been marked by clandestine trade in arms and black market commodities including timber, diamonds, and oil. While the devastating conflicts that raged in the region in the 1990s have largely subsided, insecurity has not, and West African states still struggle to adequately control their borders and peripheral rural areas. The region remains awash with small arms, and in some countries the military remains unaccountable, abusive, and outside of full control by the government (Florquin and Berman 2005; Kandeh 2004, 161–165).

Despite its long history of conflict, economic crisis, and repressive governance, many West African states are currently showing signs of significant improvement in the rule of law, governance, political stability, and security (UNROWA 2008, 1). Legitimate multi-party democracies have been established and sustained in some countries (most notably Ghana and Senegal) and sincere efforts are being made to encourage government accountability, civil society, and economic development across the region. Yet West Africa remains a deeply troubled and unstable place. Rice and Patrick's index, for example, lists eight out of the 16 states in West Africa as "critically weak" (Rice and Patrick 2008, 10–11).<sup>3</sup> Corruption, which is rightly considered a major impediment to development and state effectiveness, is also rampant within the region; the majority of West African states rank extremely low on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (Transparency International 2008). While this summary of state weakness is brief, it nevertheless paints a picture of a region marked by high levels of institutional incapacity, political instability, unaccount-

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3. Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Niger, Togo, and Nigeria. The authors list only four West African states (Ghana, Senegal, Cape Verde, and Benin) in the top quintile of "states to watch."

able governance, and profound underdevelopment. It is precisely these pre-existing weaknesses that facilitated the development of West Africa into a central transit zone for Andean cocaine making its way to the profitable Western European market.

Since the end of the Cold War, transnational organized crime has become a central international security concern. The unregulated flow of illicit goods including weapons, narcotics, humans, and black market commodities of all types are a threat to the security and territorial integrity of the modern nation-state (Mittleman and Johnston 1999, 114–115). Moreover, organized criminal groups invest significant resources subverting the defenses that a state has erected to confront them. Often, providing an adequate level of security for a criminal enterprise requires that criminal actors develop partnerships with key state actors, such as law-enforcement, the judiciary, customs officials, and the security forces (Williams 2002, 165). While certainly no state is immune from the corrosive effects that transnational organized crime—particularly narcotics trafficking—has on state and society, it is clear that weak states are considerably more vulnerable to the ill-effects of organized crime than strong, functioning states. Phil Williams states that “...[transnational criminal organizations] flourish in states with weak structures and dubious legitimacy, which derives from economic inequalities, the dominance of traditional oligarchies, the lack of congruence between nation and state, poor economic performance, and ethnic divisions. In such circumstances, the development of parallel political and economic structures is almost inevitable” (Williams 1994, 109). In states exhibiting critical weaknesses, organized criminal groups find it easy to ensconce themselves within the structures of the state, remove state actors obstructing their enterprise, capture segments of key state institutions such as law enforcement, customs, and security forces, and—in extreme circumstances—confront the state directly (Lee and Thoumi 2003, 81; Godson 2003, 5; Zaitch 2002, 36; O’Neil 2009, 67–69).

The criminalization of state actors and institutions is dependent on the size and scale of the criminal enterprise: as the scale of a criminal enterprise grows, so too does its organizational complexity and visibility. It thus becomes necessary to compromise or co-opt higher levels of the state

apparatus, essentially moving from low-level bribery of customs or law-enforcement officials, for example, to the active facilitation of the criminal enterprise by high-level political and state actors (Cornell 2006, 41). Transnational narcotics trafficking is characterized by a high degree of complexity and a multiplicity of actors all along the commodity chain from points of cultivation to target markets, and its monumental scale "...implies complex transnational communications and transport, which suggests protection (or tolerance) from national- and international-level police, military, and transportation authorities" (Bailey and Godson 2000, 20). Additionally, the degree to which state actors will be co-opted or removed is also highly dependent on previous modes of political organization; in countries with political systems marked by high degrees of informality, facilitation of criminal enterprises can become rapidly integrated into the political strategies of elites and office holders.

It is important to recognize that in many African countries political and economic power is exercised outside of the formal realm. Political systems in Africa exhibit high degrees of clientalism, patronage, and rent-seeking on the part of state actors: acquisition of positions within the state apparatus is the result of informal patron-client relationships, and these positions are used primarily to appropriate resources that can be used to strengthen one's political and economic power (Medard 2002, 381). Moreover, as some scholars have argued, political elites make use of clandestine markets alongside the appropriation of state resources to contribute to their overall political and economic position (Reno 2000, 434–435). As a result, the ability of the state to provide public goods deteriorates as high-level systemic corruption appropriates the resources needed for the public sector to operate effectively. Eventually, civil servants go unpaid and use their office to engage in rent-seeking simply to supplement their meager and sometimes non-existent salaries (Van de Walle 2004, 105). In some cases, such as Sierra Leone, the systemic appropriation of state resources by political elites gradually deteriorated the state itself, partially leading to the country's civil war between 1990 and 2002 (Klay Kieh Jr. 2005, 166). Resource scarcity, exacerbated by personal appropriation, creates a context in which competition for political office becomes more intense, sometimes leading to political violence (Allen 1999, 376–381). While it would be disingenu-

ous to claim that informal political and economic authority is the exclusive mode of politics in West Africa, framing an analysis from this lens holds

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Where political and economic power are run through informal, and sometimes illegal, channels in a resource-scarce environment characterized by intense competition, massive sums of money from narcotics trafficking may be quickly regarded as an opportunity for the accumulation of resources, and concurrently, political power.

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significant explanatory power when considering the rapidity with which trafficking groups were able to partner with high-level state actors in the region. Where political and economic power are run through informal, and sometimes illegal, channels in a resource-scarce environment characterized by intense competition, massive sums of money from narcotics trafficking may be

quickly regarded as an opportunity for the accumulation of resources, and concurrently, political power.

International narcotics trafficking groups are often well-organized and extremely profitable, which increases their ability to manipulate governance and undermine security (Naylor 1997, 20–21; Cornell 2006, 40–42). In 2003, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimated that “...the value of the global illicit drug market...was...US\$13 bn [billion] at the production level, at \$94 bn at the wholesale level (taking seizures into account), and at US \$322 bn based on retail prices and taking seizures and other losses into account” (UNODC 2005, 127). The most recent data suggests that the cocaine market alone is worth \$70 bn (UNODC 2009b, 14). The most damaging internationally traded narcotics, in terms of their effects on security, governance, development, and social cost, are opiates and cocaine (INCB 2002, 1). The danger that narcotics trafficking groups pose to national security, in a very narrow sense, is evident in the experiences of Colombia during the late 1980s and early 1990s, and more recently in Mexico, where trafficking organizations have directly confronted the government, leading to thousands of deaths in armed conflict between well-armed traffickers and state security forces (Jordan 1999, 82; O’Neil 2009, 67–69).

Narcotics trafficking also has high social costs outside of the corruption of the public sphere. Increased distribution and abuse of narcotics are often seen in both production and transit states, bringing a host of other problems such as larger domestic criminal groups, lower economic productivity, and higher rates of drug addiction and dependence (INCB 2002, 7–8; Williams 1994, 108). What distinguishes cocaine and opiates from other illegal psychotropic substances is the distance between the areas of cultivation and production and the target markets, which are North America (principally the U.S.) and Western Europe (UNODC 2009a, 15). Narcotics that are trafficked through a series of transit states inevitably affect governance, security, and development, even if these states are neither narcotics-producing nor narcotics-consuming countries.

The dynamics of the international narcotics trade are marked by a high degree of fluidity and flexibility on the part of trafficking networks, especially when faced with increased law-enforcement efforts to obstruct functioning trafficking methods and routes (Allen 2005, 29). Where direct shipment to the target market is either too costly or risky, trafficking groups use transshipment through other states to penetrate the target market (Friman 1995, 70–71). The rise in cocaine trade through West Africa in the last several years is indicative of the development of new transit states in the transnational commodity chain of Andean cocaine. Aside from the serious structural and institutional weakness of many West African states and the reality of informal governance within sub-Saharan Africa, the addition of pre-existing narcotics trafficking networks within the region has directly contributed to West Africa's development into one of the key transit hubs for the international cocaine trade.

## **NARCOTICS TRAFFICKING IN WEST AFRICA BEFORE THE SURGE**

West Africa in particular and sub-Saharan Africa in general have a long history of cross-border smuggling networks—often working in cooperation with state officials and political elites—for consumer goods, small arms, natural resources, and humans (Williams and Brooks 1999, 93–94; de Andres 2008, 205; Ellis 1999, 154–155). Moreover, West Africa has a particularly notorious history of being the home base for multiple drug

trafficking networks, primarily from Nigeria and Ghana (Ellis 2009, 176). Compared with the larger and more hierarchical trafficking groups found in other regions in the world, West African trafficking networks have remained small, flexible, and entrepreneurial (Ellis 2009, 176–177; Sun, Wylter, and Cook 2009, 26–27). A 2005 UNODC study of West African trafficking

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Unlike other narcotics trafficking groups that specialize in one commodity for an extended period of time, West African networks are more business-focused, shifting their operations towards the largest profits where and when they are able. While West African narcotics trafficking groups remain small, flexible, and entrepreneurial, they have, since the 1980s, developed a substantial niche within the international narcotics trade.

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groups found that the most common form of trafficking network was "...a form of organization that is project-based. In this sense, criminal enterprises in West Africa use similar techniques to legitimate traders and business people typical of lineage-based societies. The standard procedure is for an individual entrepreneur who succeeds in making money in a particular field, as the volume grows, to invite one or more junior relatives or other dependents to join

himself or herself in the business" (UNODC 2005b, 15). West African trafficking groups rarely specialize in one particular product, and can refit their trafficking routes and methods in order to move into new commodity markets, both legal and illegal (UNODC 2005b, 17–18). Therefore, unlike other narcotics trafficking groups that specialize in one commodity for an extended period of time, West African networks are more business-focused, shifting their operations towards the largest profits where and when they are able. While West African narcotics trafficking groups remain small, flexible, and entrepreneurial, they have, since the 1980s, developed a substantial niche within the international narcotics trade.

As several scholars have observed, the inclusion of West African trafficking networks into the global narcotics trade was stimulated by the economic downturn in the region during the 1970s and 1980s, encouraging some West Africans to become involved in the trade in the absence of alternative livelihoods that would provide similar returns (Shaw 2002, 294; Akyeampong

2005, 439). Early West African traffickers had a comparative advantage to other nationalities in the narcotics trade: customs officials and law enforcement agencies in target countries were not suspecting narcotics to flow from West Africa (Ellis 2009, 177). The rise of West African trafficking groups in the global narcotics trade was stunning; by the mid-1980s more than 15,000 Nigerians had been arrested for drug charges across the world, and by 1989 U.S. authorities claimed that over half of the narcotics coming into New York's JFK international airport were from Nigerian groups (Ellis 2009, 180). Importantly, it does not appear that West African groups engaged in the bulk transshipment of narcotics from production regions to the profitable markets in North America and Western Europe. Rather, trafficking networks delivered relatively small amounts of narcotics smuggled by human couriers aboard commercial airliners to target markets, where they were distributed through local networks (UNODC 2005, 21–22; Ellis 2009, 186–188).

Before the surge in cocaine trafficking in the mid-2000s, West African trafficking groups did not exhibit the same degree of influence on governance and politics in West African states, compared to the experience of other countries such as Colombia and Mexico (Bayart et al. 1999, 26–30). The small size and diversified nature of West African trafficking groups allowed these networks to develop profitable trafficking routes and techniques without resorting to high levels of state infiltration or violence (UNCICP 2000, 84). While West African traffickers did not develop the same type of criminal-state relationships seen in other countries, their presence in the region helped facilitate the development of industrial transshipment during the mid-2000s. International criminal organizations often rely on pre-existing local groups to facilitate their entrance into new countries, although there are examples of confrontation as well (Williams 1994, 106). The existence of experienced West African criminal networks, many of which may have had relationships with Latin American cocaine producing and trafficking groups prior to the surge in bulk cocaine transiting West Africa (UNODC 2005, 17; Ellis 2009, 186), can be seen as a contributing factor in the surge in bulk cocaine trafficking through the region after 2004.

## FROM ENTREPRENEURIALISM TO INDUSTRIAL TRANSSHIPMENT

Beginning in 2004, previously unheard of seizures of large amounts of cocaine began to be reported in and around West Africa. In 2008 UNODC

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In the first three quarters of 2007, an estimated 99 percent of the cocaine seized across the entire African continent was seized in West Africa (de Andres 2008, 214). What made the surge in the seizures even more alarming was that, unlike previous seizures involving small amounts of narcotics, bulk shipments over 100 kilograms (kg) became increasingly common.

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reported that cocaine seizures in Africa represented 2.1 percent of the global total, as compared to 2000, when they represented 0.1 percent (UNODC 2008a, 79). In the first three quarters of 2007, an estimated 99 percent of the cocaine seized across the entire African continent was seized in West Africa (de Andres 2008, 214). What made the surge in the seizures even more alarming was that, unlike previous seizures

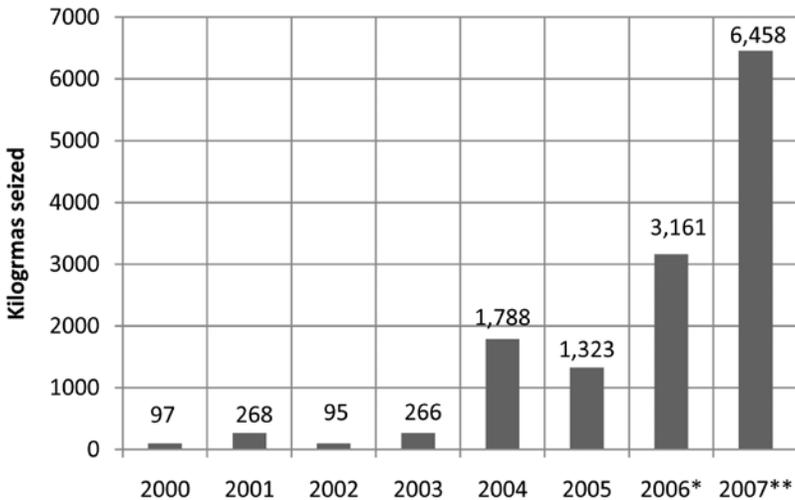
involving small amounts of narcotics, bulk shipments over 100 kilograms (kg) became increasingly common.

In 2004, Ghanaian authorities seized 588 kg of cocaine in the major port city of Tema, which the U.S. State Department claimed to be “West Africa’s largest drug bust ever” (U.S. State Department INCSR 2005, 533). Also in 2004, French and Togolese authorities seized 450 kg of cocaine off Togo’s coast (INCB 2004, 40). In 2005, the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) reported that “Since the beginning of 2004, seizures of cocaine totaling some 40 tons have been effected on the high seas on ships coming from West Africa” (INCB 2005, 45).

More record seizures were reported in the region in 2006 and 2007. In May 2006, Ghanaian authorities uncovered 1.9 metric tons (mt) of cocaine in the coastal village of Prampan, by far the largest single seizure in the country’s history (UNODC 2007a, 8). In June 2006, Nigerian authorities reportedly seized a mixture of cocaine and cement totaling 14 mt in a shipping container in the Lagos harbor (Ugwoke 2006; INCB 2006, 38). In June 2007, Senegalese authorities stumbled upon 1.2 mt of cocaine in an abandoned boat on the southern coast of the country, and seized an

additional 1.2 mt of cocaine in a house nearby the first seizure (UNODC 2007, 4; APF 2007a). Between 2006 and 2007, both the suspected volume of cocaine as well as the number of countries recording seizures totaling over 100 kg rose dramatically: in 2006 only three countries—Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, and Nigeria—reported seizures of more than 100 kg, while eight West African countries reported such seizures in 2007 (UNODC 2007b, 10). Data from Europe in 2008 indicated that an estimated 22 percent of all cocaine seizures were suspected to have transited Africa, as compared to five percent of the total in 2004 (UNODC 2008a, 79). It was estimated that 99 percent of the cocaine seized in Portugal in 2007 was trafficked through West African waters (UNODC 2008a, 79). Overall, UNODC estimated that \$1.8 billion worth of cocaine, in wholesale prices, was being shipped through West Africa annually, a sum larger than the GDP of several West African countries (UNODC 2007b, 41).

**Figure 2: Cocaine Seizures in West Africa, 2000–2007**



Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Cocaine Trafficking in West Africa: The Threat to Stability and Development (with Special Reference to Guinea-Bissau). Vienna: UNODC 2007, 8.

\*Preliminary data for 2006 based on available data as of November 2007.

\*\*From data collected by UNODC between January and November 2007.

Importantly, many of the seizures in West Africa did not result from increased capacity or heightened surveillance on the part of law enforcement. Instead UNODC reported that "...the circumstances surrounding the best-documented seizures suggest that most are made by chance, and that, in many instances, the amount seized was much less than the amount trafficked" (UNODC 2007b, 7). This indicates that the unprecedented surge in cocaine trafficking through the region did not coincide with an appreciable increase in West African law-enforcement capacity, but rather pointed to an even greater, unrecorded volume of cocaine passing through the region (de Andres 2008, 213).

### **THE NEW DYNAMICS OF WEST AFRICA'S COCAINE TRADE**

The abrupt shift from limited entrepreneurial trafficking networks to bulk transshipment of cocaine through West Africa is related to an overall shift in the international cocaine market and the development of newer and more profitable markets outside North America. Principally, the use of West Africa as a transshipment region is linked to the rapid expansion of the European cocaine market. The market for cocaine in Western Europe has expanded dramatically in recent years, and while North America still continues to be the largest consumer of cocaine, with nearly seven million users annually, the Western European market currently holds 3.9 million cocaine users, with an annual demand of between 135 to 145 mt of cocaine (UNODC 2009a, 80; UNODC 2007b, 8). Cocaine also fetches considerably higher prices on the European market: the wholesale price per kilogram in Europe was almost double that in the United States in 2008 (UNODC 2008a, 78).

The rising demand of cocaine in Europe is combined with a steadily declining market in North America, and particularly in the United States (UNODC 2008a, 87; UNODC 2009a, 81). Moreover, the rise of Mexican trafficking groups as key importers of cocaine to the United States, as well as the relative success of interdiction efforts in the Caribbean, deprived some South American traffickers direct access to the North American market (UNODC 2007b, 17). The constriction of the North American cocaine market encouraged cocaine trafficking groups to re-orient their operations towards the rising

European market, increasingly using West African states as transit points along the way. The dynamics of the trade were reflected in new forms of trafficking, as well as an expansion of pre-existing trafficking routes.

Despite the addition of bulk shipments of cocaine through the region, West African trafficking groups continued to rely on the tried and true courier methods used since they became involved in the trade in the 1980s. The number of couriers entering European airports rose as West Africa became a transshipment region for bulk cocaine: from 2004 to 2008, more than 1,300 couriers were detected coming into Europe via commercial airlines, and between 2006 and 2008, over two metric tons of cocaine were seized from couriers flying into European airports. According to UNODC, the percentage of traffickers nearly doubled in 11 European airports between 2006 and 2007 (UNODC 2007b, 21; UNODC 2008b, 13).

Shipments of bulk cocaine to West Africa by both air and sea appear to share similar methods. Bulk cocaine is brought in via these channels, where it is repackaged into smaller amounts and prepared for transshipment to European markets (UNODC 2007a, 8–9). Maritime shipments of cocaine originate in South America and sail across the Atlantic to West African ports, where cocaine is stockpiled for onward transfer to Europe (EURPOL 2007, 4). Alongside a rise in maritime shipments, small airplanes specially outfitted for the flight across the Atlantic land on secured or obscured airstrips in West Africa where the cocaine is offloaded and repackaged for shipment to Europe (UNODC 2007b, 11–12). Between 2007 and 2008, multiple flights carrying hundreds of kilograms of cocaine were intercepted in or on their way to West Africa (Xinhua News 2007; UNODC 2007a, 9; Australian Broadcasting Company 2007). The large-scale shipment of cocaine to West Africa by both air and maritime channels indicates the region's serious law-enforcement and border control deficits, as traffickers demonstrated their ability to use both shipping and air infrastructure within West Africa to transfer bulk shipments of cocaine. With the rise in transshipment of cocaine through the region, new dynamics of trafficking and new actors in the trade have also been noticed.

Currently, the cocaine trade through West Africa remains multifaceted, with multiple actors, including Latin American groups, pre-existing West

African trafficking networks, and new entrepreneurs engaging in the trade in separate but complementary capacities (Mazzitelli 2007, 1075–1076). West African networks continue to maintain their flexible and entrepreneurial orientation while facilitating a larger and more substantial flow of bulk cocaine into European markets. Importantly, the trade has not yet experienced the widespread use of violence that has accompanied narcotics trafficking in other parts of the world, leading some observers to suggest that there is currently enough narcotics flowing through the region to accommodate the multiple actors and therefore keep destabilizing competition in check (UNODC 2008b, 28).

It is important not to over-emphasize the amount of cocaine transiting West Africa as a percentage of the global narcotics trade. The surge in trafficking has indeed been startling, but, on the whole, West Africa still only accounts for a very small percentage of the cocaine that is trafficked internationally.

**Figure 3: Cocaine Trafficking Routes through West Africa**



Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *Transnational Trafficking and Rule of Law in West Africa: A Threat Assessment*. Vienna: UNODC 2009, 13.

While the trade through West Africa does not begin to rival that through North America, the potential profits that can be made from even small quantities of the drug increase its destabilizing effects, especially within weak, impoverished countries. As the following case studies illustrate, even the relatively modest flow of cocaine has had serious effects on West Africa's weakest states.

### **COCAINE TRAFFICKING, GOVERNANCE, AND STABILITY IN WEST AFRICA'S WEAKEST STATES**

While the recent boom in cocaine trafficking has had effects on nearly every state in the region, it has had the most deleterious impact on Guinea-Bissau and Guinea-Conakry, two of the most underdeveloped, politically unstable, and institutionally dysfunctional states in West Africa. Considering that organized crime most visibly affects states that are already fragile, it is little

surprise that foreign trafficking groups found these states to be easily exploitable gateways from which to conduct their business. While both Guinea-Bissau and Guinea-Conakry have similar attributes in terms of institutional weakness and severe capacity gaps, the post-colonial governance experience of the two

countries is very different. Therefore, the effects on governance, stability, and development that cocaine has had within the two states are unique, and echo the specific aspects of state fragility that existed in the two countries prior to the boom in cocaine trafficking after 2004.

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#### **Guinea-Bissau: A West African 'Narco-State'?**

Guinea-Bissau is one of the smallest and least developed states in West Africa. Since independence from Portugal in 1974, the country has been plagued with political instability, economic stagnation, endemic corruption, civil violence, and a deep rift between state and society (Forrest 2002, 236–263). The country's politics are marked by competition for control of

state resources between opposing factions based on informal patron-client relationships (Forrest 2002, 239). As Estanislao Gacitua-Mario et al. state: “Political power in Guinea-Bissau is concentrated in an executive subject to limited checks and balances from weak democratic institutions. The state also retains main control over access to the majority of resources in the country. As a result, the stakes are high for the presidency and key political positions, undermining efforts at building national unity in a country with more than 20 ethnic groups, widespread poverty, and great disparities between people” (Gacitua-Mario et al. 2007, 29). The military operates autonomously from civilian government control and is highly influential, although the military itself has had internal factional struggles over power and resources (ICG 2009a, 7–8; Observatoire de l’Afrique 2008, 6–7). The country experienced a brief civil war between the President Joao Bernardo Vieira and a dominant faction in the military led by Chief of Staff Asumane Mane between 1998 and 1999, which devastated the country’s already meager infrastructure—especially in the capital city (Sid-Barry and Wodon 2007, 14).

A deeply impoverished and profoundly underdeveloped country, Guinea-Bissau relies on trade dominated by cashew nuts, which represent 95 percent of its total exports (EIU 2008, 30). Guinea-Bissau’s law-enforcement agencies, while remarkably large, are poorly resourced and underpaid, its correctional facilities are almost non-existent, and its judicial system is weak and does not operate independently from powerful state actors (UNODC 2007b, 14–16; Vincent 2007, 4; Observatoire de l’Afrique 2008, 4–5; IRIN 2009d). The Guinea-Bissauan state is also incapable of providing more than minimal public services, and, consequently, citizens have a lack of faith and trust in the institutions of the state (Gacitua-Mario et al. 2007, 34–37). Compounding the susceptibility of the state to organized crime, the government lacks the capacity to fully exert control over the entirety of its territory, especially across the 80 sparsely populated islands that make up the Bijagos Archipelago (Vulliamy 2008). Some observers of Guinea-Bissau have gone as far as to declare that the state in Guinea-Bissau simply does not exist in any coherent form: “The state in Guinea-Bissau appears as a legal and socio-logical fiction devoid of any sovereignty or moral or political authority that can survive beyond its empirical existence, shored up by external economic

help and international regulations and agreements” (Bordonaro 2009, 37). The undeniable weakness of the structures of the state itself—a poorly paid, unaccountable, and divided armed forces; informal political culture; and crippling poverty and economic stagnation—has left a situation that foreign trafficking groups were able to exploit to their advantage.

At the height of the cocaine boom in the late 2000s, Guinea-Bissau was recognized as one of the principal transit countries for cocaine into West Africa (UNODC 2007b, 5). The structural weakness of the state and the corruptibility of state actors and political elites allowed foreign trafficking groups to operate with near-impunity, even to the point where some traffickers established a physical presence in the country, evidenced by the purchase of up-scale estates and the unprecedented surge of luxury vehicles (Sullivan 2008). The rapid criminalization of key state actors has been concurrent with the surge of cocaine trafficking through the country (Vincent 2007, 2–3; ICG 2008b, 21–23). There are many instances of military resources being used in facilitating bulk shipments of cocaine into the country; there are multiple reports of soldiers using military resources to transport cocaine within Guinea-Bissau, of aircraft delivering bulk shipments through military airfields, as well as the disappearance of hundreds of kilos of the drug from official custody (UNSC 2007, 6; U.S. State Department INCSR 2009, 295). It is also widely believed that key individuals in the state are deeply involved in the cocaine trade, including the former head of the navy, Jose Na Tchuto, who attempted a coup shortly after the presidential elections in 2008 (Africa Confidential 2008a). While a lack of concrete evidence makes it difficult to pinpoint exactly which state actors are involved in the trade, the facilitation of trafficking and the obstruction of investigations into the trade indicate that relationships between foreign traffickers and military and political elites have gone beyond bribery and low-level entrepreneurial trafficking to large-scale, active facilitation of trafficking tons of cocaine through the country.

The huge cocaine trade has also contributed to insecurity in the country. Guinea-Bissau’s history includes high levels of political violence, but the recent surge in this violence in the past few years may be associated with increased competition over access to the cocaine trade. It has been suggested that the double

murders of President Vieira and Military Chief of Staff General Tagme Na Wai in March 2009 were related to the cocaine trade, although no irrefutable evidence has been brought forward to substantiate this claim (Baldauf 2009; Vernaschi 2009; ICG 2009b, 3). Other events, including an attempted coup in 2008 and the subsequent arrest of the Chief of Staff of the navy, have also been tied to involvement in and competition over control of the cocaine trade (ICG 2009a, 9–10; Africa Confidential 2008a, 9). The addition of a highly profitable illegal trade through Guinea-Bissau has upped the ante in the country's already violent struggles for political and economic power (ICG 2009b, 1).

A further indication of direct political and military involvement in cocaine trafficking can be seen in the increasing intimidation by the military and political elites of human rights activists, journalists, and members of the judiciary who have been active in publicly exposing the relationships between traffickers and state actors (Vincent 2007, 3–4; IFJ 2007; AFP 2007b;

Latham 2008). Moreover, the influx of cocaine has encouraged the development of a nascent domestic market, and there are indications that cocaine purchasing and use is widespread across the country and especially within the capital city (IRIN 2008a). Fishermen in Guinea-Bissau, facing greater expenses and fewer profits in their traditional occupation, have moved into facilitating cocaine trafficking by transferring shipments of cocaine from large

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In total, Guinea-Bissau may represent the sum of the worst fears that observers had for the effect of narcotics trafficking in the region. The country's institutions have been compromised, its civil society intimidated, its political stability threatened by factional intrigues and violence, and its impoverished citizens have increasingly become involved in the trade as a source of livelihood.

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transport ships to stockpiles on the country's poorly monitored coasts (IRIN 2008b). In total, Guinea-Bissau may represent the sum of the worst fears that observers had for the effect of narcotics trafficking in the region. The country's institutions have been compromised, its civil society intimidated, its political stability threatened by factional intrigues and violence, and its impoverished citizens have increasingly become involved in the trade as a source of livelihood. While there have been suggestions that foreign traffickers have recently

abandoned Guinea-Bissau (Thomas 2009), the structural, political, and economic deficiencies that led the country to be a cocaine entrepôt have not been addressed. While the election of Malam Bacai Sanhá in July 2009 gives some cause for hope that the country can seize this opportunity to put urgently needed reforms into place, many of Guinea-Bissau's structural and political weaknesses have yet to be addressed (UN News Service 2009).

### **Guinea-Conakry: From Criminal Regime to Criminal Regime**

Like Guinea-Bissau, Guinea-Conakry has a post-colonial history characterized by political instability, economic stagnation, underdevelopment, violence, and corruption. Since independence in 1958, the country has had only three heads of state, two of whom gained office through military coups (ICG 2007, 1; BBC News 2008). Lansana Conté, who seized power in a coup d'état in 1984, maintained his regime by cultivating the loyalty of military, business, and political elites by allowing them to develop private fortunes via the state coffers, as well as fully controlling elections after Guinea went through democratization in the 1990s (ICG 2007, 2–3). The regime resorted to brute force to maintain its hegemony within the state, evidenced by the brutal crackdown on unions and civil society groups during a general strike in 2007 (HRW 2007a). Guinea-Conakry's law enforcement and judiciary are underfunded, understaffed, poorly equipped, and lack the necessary training to confront narcotics trafficking organizations that have benefitted from the impunity exercised by political and military elites at the core of state power (U.S. State Department INCSR 2009, 292–293).

Before the military coup in December 2008, the extent of the trade through Guinea-Conakry was not fully understood, although it was widely believed that cocaine traffickers had developed strong relationships with political and military elites, and especially with members of the President's inner circle (ICG 2008a, 5–6). The fact that couriers embarking from Guinea vastly outnumbered those coming from other West African airports according to arrest data from European airports between 2006 and 2008 suggested that the country was a key transit state for cocaine trafficking (UNODC 2008b, 16).<sup>4</sup> The political

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4. According to UNODC, 88 out of 100,000 people flying from Guinea-Conakry were detected as couriers, compared to the next highest country, Mali, which had 49 per 100,000. Moreover, Guinea-Conakry ranked third, with 13% after Senegal (17%) and Nigeria (16%), as a share of the total volume of cocaine detected on couriers flying into Europe during the same period.

protection offered to traffickers resulted in a low volume of arrests and almost no convictions of individuals accused of trafficking cocaine, as well as the repeated reclamation of cocaine seized by the country's underfunded and poorly staffed counter-narcotics unit (IRIN 2008c).<sup>5</sup> Despite the widespread belief that state actors close to the President were fully involved in cocaine trafficking, the full extent of this state facilitation remained shrouded in rumor and speculation until the December 2008 coup.

Conté's death in December 2008 was immediately followed by a military coup by junior officers led by a relatively unknown army Captain, Moussa Dadis Camara (Gettleman 2008). The junta, naming itself the National Council for Democracy and Development (CNDD), attracted considerable public support for its aggressively stated intention to confront corruption and criminality within the Guinean political system (ICG 2009d, 5–6; Africa Confidential 2009a, 4). In late February, the CNDD arrested a clique of high-ranking members of the security forces, including the former President's eldest son, Ousmane Conté (APF 2009a; AP 2009a). In a televised confession after his arrest, Ousmane and the other detainees provided details of the extent to which the inner circle of the Conté regime had used state resources to facilitate cocaine trafficking through the country (Callimachi 2009; Africa Confidential 2009b, 9). Further arrests followed in June, when high ranking military officials of the former regime, including the heads of army and navy, were also charged with trafficking (UPI 2009). Although the CNDD gained public praise for its actions against Conté's inner circle, the arrests and confessions of members of Conté's regime also have been criticized within the country; the country's judges led a strike in opposition to the parallel justice system erected by the CNDD, and rights groups in the country claimed that the arrests were politically selective, and that members of the CNDD are equally responsible for drug trafficking but have not been arrested (AP 2009b; Callimachi 2009).

The possibility that the CNDD is using accusations of drug trafficking as a political tool against opponents in the former regime and within the

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5. The extent of elite culpability with the drug trade was made apparent in 2008, when the seizure of an airplane delivering cocaine in the town of Boke, thought to be one of the main axes of shipment into the country, resulted in the arrest of high-level political actors, including the governor, mayor, and military commander in the state.

opposition political parties and critical civil society in order to consolidate power within the country and avoid elections should not be ruled out. For example, in March 2009 CNDD troops raided the home of a union leader on suspicion of cocaine trafficking, an oddity in the general trend towards arresting members of the former ruling clique (AFP 2009b). There is a definite precedent for the instrumental use of corruption allegations against political rivals in many different situations in Africa and elsewhere, and in this sense, the actions of the CNDD are not unique (Chabal and Daloz 1999, 104; Szeftel 1998, 236). The danger posed in this context is not the manipulation of the state by narcotics trafficking groups, but the entrenchment of a dictatorial military junta in the country, where there is no precedent for a democratic political transition (ICG 2009a, 11).

Recent developments in the country indicate that the CNDD is, in fact, unprepared to hand over power to a democratically elected government. Initial popular support for Camara and the CNDD has rapidly evaporated as the junta has resorted to repression and brutality to maintain its power in the country. Moreover, the military has faced increasing fragmentation; separate factions within the CNDD are believed to be recruiting rival militias and developing political and economic networks in competition with one another, which has led to a rise in ethnic tensions within the country (ICG 2009b, 5–7). Furthermore, Camara has reneged on his initial promise that no individual from the CNDD would stand for office in the elections. A rumor that the CNDD leader would, in fact, be standing for election resulted in a protest organized by a coalition of opposition parties and civil society groups in Conakry on September 28, 2009: the demonstration immediately faced a brutally violent crackdown by the military resulting in more than 150 deaths and widespread sexual violence against female protestors (Nossiter 2009; HRW 2009c). The recent violence and repression in Guinea further indicates that focus on the region should not be concentrated only on combating the trafficking itself, but on actively confronting the deeper challenges of unaccountable political leadership, corruption, political repression, and poverty. Therefore, although the criminalization of state actors may now be less of a threat, the possibility that Guinea-Conakry will revert to the status quo of unaccountable, personalized leadership reminiscent of the two previous regimes does not augur well for future develop-

ment of the country, with or without the presence of cocaine trafficking networks.

What is particularly disturbing about the examples of Guinea-Bissau and Guinea-Conakry is the astonishing speed with which foreign trafficking groups were apparently able to establish firm relationships with high level state officials. Assuming that the boom in cocaine trafficking through West Africa began between 2003 and 2004, it is stunning that firm relationships between high-level state actors and trafficking groups were forged in such a short period of time. The structural weakness of these two states left them

exposed to cocaine trafficking and allowed political and military elites to profit off the trade by integrating it into already existing political and economic networks. It is, therefore, important to keep in mind that narcotics trafficking only contributes to the environment of state fragility and political instability already apparent in

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West Africa. The real threat that continued high levels of narcotics trafficking in the region poses is the exacerbation of these weaknesses, and a possible reversal of the overall progress the region has made in improving the rule of law, economic development, democratic governance, and security.

### **LOOKING TOWARDS THE FUTURE: POLICY DIRECTIONS FOR WEST AFRICA**

It is currently believed that the cocaine trade through West Africa is declining at almost as rapid a pace as it rose. Recent data indicate that the suspected volume of the trade has declined precipitously since 2008; both the number of seizures in West Africa as well as the number of couriers apprehended in Europe has rapidly fallen off (UNODC 2009b, 16–17). While this is undoubtedly a positive sign, it would be inappropriate to declare that the threat has conclusively passed. The sudden drop in trafficking in the region could be a sign that efforts to disrupt the trade have been

successful, but could also indicate that traffickers and their state partners have been more successful in concealing the trade. Moreover, cocaine is not the only commodity that is illegally trafficked through the region. Looted oil, cigarettes, counterfeit medication, small arms and ammunition, and humans are all trafficked across West Africa and rely on the same weaknesses and incapacities as the trade in cocaine (UNODC 2009b, 11). Overall, the conditions that led to West Africa's rapid development into a transit hub for cocaine trafficking need to be addressed. As this paper has emphasized, the challenge for the region does not primarily come from the cocaine trade, but stems from the endemic weakness of the states in the region. Therefore, it is ultimately necessary for stakeholders in the region to promote long-term policies aimed at strengthening and legitimizing West Africa's weak states. West African states did not implode overnight: institutional decay developed over decades of misrule and economic stagnation. Assuming that West African states possess the institutional capacity and political will to rapidly implement counter-narcotics policies is inappropriate and unhelpful. Immediate funding for counter-narcotics is urgently needed, and may deliver some marginal returns in the short term, but these initiatives remain woefully underfunded and are overwhelmingly targeted towards supporting regional law enforcement efforts (Sun, Wyler, and Cook 2009, 29–38.) Current policies are not taking into account the overall challenge of state weakness that encouraged the development of narcotics trafficking in the first place. Thus, I have eschewed making firm policy proposals in favor of broader, long-term policy directions. Even if short-term policies along multiple levels are enacted in West Africa to confront cocaine trafficking, they will not substantially contribute to developing state capacity unless they have been organized around longer-term goals, including the following:

**Ending Impunity:** The cycle of unaccountable and corrupt political leadership in West Africa is one of the primary reasons that international trafficking groups were able to so rapidly penetrate the region's weak states. It is imperative that steps are taken to end the impunity that West African elites have enjoyed. Where impunity reigns there is rarely an independent move for reform. Elite involvement in cocaine trafficking, for example, is a serious violation of international law, and should be treated as such. Support and resources should be directed towards domestic and international

enquiries into the role of elites and state actors in illicit trafficking. Donor support should be invested in developing autonomous and legitimate anti-corruption institutions within West Africa's weak states as well as supporting domestic corruption investigations and trials with resources and legal expertise. International support for domestic investigations and prosecutions against criminals and elites, as long as they are judged to be legitimate, will aid progress in helping to end impunity and deter similar actions by elites in the future. In the absence of a commitment to investigate, try, and punish criminal activity on the part of state actors, there will be little incentive for future political leaders and state elites to independently enact adequate reforms.

Not only is it imperative that impunity be confronted to deter the political corruption that is deeply corrosive to the capacity of the state itself, it is also urgent to identify domestic partners that possess the political will to

carry out necessary reforms. For example, confronting the cocaine trade by partnering with institutions and state actors who may be involved in the trade themselves will, on the whole, accomplish very little. The international community should not simply assume that state actors and political elites are automatically oriented

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towards serving the public interest (Englebert and Tull 2008, 109–110), and should make sure that the selected domestic partners are committed to the long-term development of their states.

**Professional Development and Security Sector Reform:** As stated, the poverty and clientelistic politics of some West African states have led to a deeply inefficient, unprofessional, and under-resourced civil service. In order to provide critical public goods, the civil service needs to be professionalized. Employment and promotion needs to be based on demonstrated competence and effectiveness, not nepotism. If the civil service demonstrates that it can provide public goods and is responsive to the needs of citizens, state

legitimacy will be enhanced. Moreover, citizens who have felt excluded from the state may have more confidence in its general ability to deliver public goods. Donor attention should be focused on developing the civil service in these countries in partnership with the domestic government. Professional training and bureaucratic infrastructure should be especially highlighted for critical attention, and pursued sustainably by developing mechanisms designed to monitor the effectiveness and transparency of public sector employees.

Similarly, in some West African states, and especially in Guinea-Bissau and Guinea-Conakry, security sector reform is essential. Without accountable and effective military and law enforcement services, it will be impossible to provide a basic level of physical security to citizens, arguably the state's most important responsibility. Since independence, West Africa's security services have demonstrated a disturbing proclivity to intervening in domestic politics. While some states in the region have been able to rein in and subordinate the security services to civilian authority, others have not. Unsurprisingly, security sector reform in the two Guineas presents a serious challenge. In both states, the military is politically powerful and may regard security sector reform, especially if conducted by the international community, to be a challenge to its authority and position in the country (Observatoire de l'Afrique 2007, 6). The inclusion of huge sums of money from extra-legal sources (such as cocaine) offers a further disincentive for the security services to implement reforms (Observatoire de l'Afrique 2008, 7). Despite the inherent challenges in reforming a recalcitrant security sector, it is critical that security sector reform take place before West Africa's weakest states can move forward in terms of governance, security, and economic development.

**Supporting Civil Society:** It is understandably important that serious attention be paid to enhancing state capacity in order to confront the challenges posed by cocaine trafficking, but it is equally important that efforts are also aimed at supporting domestic civil society. An exclusive focus on state-building may ignore the important role that civil society can play in contributing to security and rule of law. Human rights organizations, academics, journalists, and community and religious groups are often on the front line of investigating and criticizing corruption and the abuse of power on the

part of state actors and political elite. Vocal critics often face intimidation, harassment, detention, and violence. Civil society can play an active role in providing checks on unaccountable political leadership through publishing reports, holding demonstrations, and disseminating information to citizens of the state and to international audiences. Taking this into account, it is crucial that the important role that these critical actors can play is not ignored or sidelined in the pursuit of state-centric capacity building. Long-range efforts to strengthen the capacity and legitimacy of the state will not be comprehensive unless civil society is allowed to play an important role. If nothing else, vocal support for the activities of civil societies from the international community can provide a degree of confidence for domestic activists. Enhancing the visibility of civil society actors through regional and international recognition of their activities can put added pressure on unaccountable elites and state actors to reform, but the physical safety of these actors should always be taken into account; a high level of international visibility could lead to increased harassment and even violence against civil society actors by those who feel threatened by their actions. Again, this support needs to be a long-term commitment; it is not enough to speak out in condemnation on a periodic basis when an individual human rights activist or journalist faces repression.

**Poverty Alleviation and Economic Development:** The challenges that endemic poverty presents to the state in West Africa are numerous and long-standing. More than any other challenges facing the region, poverty alleviation and economic development will take the most time, resources, patience, and commitment to address. Unfortunately, because of the time and resources necessary to be devoted to this task, there is often a sense of fatigue on the part of donor governments and the international community. This may be unavoidable, as economic development has been undertaken, often with marginal returns, across the African continent since independence. While this is the most daunting challenge facing West Africa, it is crucial that continued efforts be made to tackle it. In the absence of more stable and diversified economies, citizens' living standards will not appreciably rise. When this is the case, the state is unable to develop a tax base, leading to an over-reliance on donor funds simply to conduct the (minimal) responsibilities of the state. In order to build functional and effective states in the region, effective poverty alleviation and economic development programs

need to be pursued with long-term commitments.

None of these policy directions can be said to be more important than another. Moreover, none can be pursued independently of each other. Political accountability requires a strong and vocal civil society to work. Public sector development and security sector reform require institutional capacity and adequate physical infrastructure. Economic development and poverty alleviation need political stability and effective economic policies. Strengthening weak states requires multiple overlapping initiatives at the domestic, regional, and international levels. It is further crucial that whatever policies are finally adopted to strengthen West Africa's weak states be regarded as legitimate by the citizens of these countries. Focusing efforts solely on combating the cocaine trade itself are necessary, but will only go so far. The attention that cocaine trafficking receives from the international community can, however, be beneficial to the overall development of West Africa's weakest states. Efforts directed at confronting the flow of narcotics through the region should be used as a springboard to address the underlying root issues that contributed to the development of the trade in the first place.

Ordinary West Africans deserve functioning, effective states in order to realize their potential. Without addressing the endemic weaknesses confronting West Africa, these states will remain vulnerable to the devastating effects of cocaine trafficking, as well as other forms of trans-national clandestine trade and insecurity. It is primarily for the benefit of the citizens of these countries that these underlying issues must be addressed.

## **CONCLUSION**

The surge in bulk cocaine trafficking in West Africa presents serious challenges to governance, development, and security within the region's fragile states. West Africa should be recognized as the prime target for the transshipment of bulk cocaine en route to the European market that it appears to have become, and for the severity of the effects that this practice has had across the region. It has been astonishingly influential in Guinea-Bissau and Guinea-Conakry, two of the weakest states in the region.

It is important to keep in mind, however, that the cocaine trade in West Africa remains marginal in terms of the global cocaine industry. Moreover, recent data indicates a significant drop in the quantity of cocaine transiting the region, indicating that the surge in trafficking from 2005 to 2008 may not be sustainable (UNODC 2009a, 73–74). This is important, as the serious long-term effects of the trade on the region as a whole may only be readily apparent if a sustained trade developed over a longer period of time. In this sense, governance in West Africa may not be transformed as a result of the cocaine trade at its present levels.

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Success in confronting the challenges posed by the narcotics trade in West Africa is not necessarily contingent on confronting the trade itself, but on strengthening the capacity and rule of law within the states that are at most risk from its ill-effects. This is necessarily a long-term project and depends on the commitment and coordination of domestic, regional, and international stakeholders.

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Organized crime and narcotics trafficking rarely criminalize strong, functioning states; the effect is felt the most within fragile dysfunctional states, often with a prior history of corruption and instability. Success in confronting the challenges posed by the narcotics trade in West Africa is not necessarily contingent on confronting the trade itself, but on strengthening the capacity and rule of law within the states that are at most risk from its

ill-effects. This is necessarily a long-term project and depends on the commitment and coordination of domestic, regional, and international stakeholders. Narcotics trafficking and the influence of criminal organizations in West Africa are symptoms of larger and more entrenched difficulties, and cannot be confronted and remedied independently of the other serious challenges facing West Africa's weakest states.

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