

EIGHT STEPS TO COUNTER THE DRUG TRADE IN WEST AFRICA

UNITED STATES SENATE CAUCUS
ON INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS CONTROL

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U.S. SENATE CAUCUS ON INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS CONTROL

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LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

Dear Colleague:

In recent years, West Africa has played an increasing role in the global drug trade. In the early 2000s, drug traffickers searching for new routes and markets began shipping South American cocaine to Europe through West Africa. Criminal groups have now expanded their operations in the region to include heroin trafficking and methamphetamine production.

While cocaine trafficked through West Africa typically reaches Europe rather than the United States, illicit activities surrounding the West African drug trade jeopardize U.S. goals in the region. The drug trade destabilizes governments and funds terrorist organizations, including Hezbollah and Al Qaeda in the Land of the Islamic Maghreb.

In 2011, the State Department launched the West Africa Cooperative Security Initiative to coordinate the U.S. response to these threats. This has been a positive start, but the Caucus believes more must be done. This report provides eight recommendations on how the United States can better assist our partners in West Africa. We look forward to hearing your response to the report.

Sincerely,



Senator Dianne Feinstein
Chairman



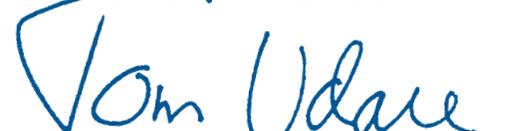
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Findings and Recommendations

MAP THE DRUG TRAFFICKING/TERROR NEXUS IN WEST AND NORTH AFRICA

1. **Finding:** Terrorist organizations in West and North Africa benefit from the region's illegal drug trade. While briefings received by Caucus staff indicate that terrorist groups are not the *primary* actors involved, these groups are financed in part by drug proceeds. Indeed, Al Qaeda in the Land of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and affiliated groups reportedly profit from taxing the transit of illegal drugs. Below are **four key examples** of the connections between terrorist organizations and the drug trade in this region:
 - In March 2013, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) arrested two Colombians in Algeria – including an alleged member of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) – along with three individuals affiliated with AQIM, on charges that the Colombians were delivering cocaine in exchange for cash and arms that were acquired in Libya following the fall of Muammar Gaddafi.¹
 - In 2010, Mauritanian authorities reported that members of AQIM provided security for a convoy of cocaine and marijuana.²
 - In December 2009, three West African Al Qaeda associates were arrested on drug and terrorism charges in Ghana and extradited to the United States. The individuals allegedly agreed to transport cocaine from Mali through North Africa into Spain with the intent to support Al Qaeda.³
 - In February 2011, the Treasury Department announced sanctions against the Lebanese Canadian Bank for its “role in facilitating the money laundering activities of an international narcotics trafficking and money laundering network.”⁴ In a complex scheme, Hezbollah operatives bought used cars in the United States and then shipped them to West Africa for resale. Once the cars were sold in West Africa, the profits from these sales were comingled with Hezbollah's proceeds from cocaine trafficking in Africa and Europe. These funds were then deposited into Lebanese financial institutions, with a portion going to Hezbollah.⁵

The role of terrorist organizations in the West African drug trade may well be limited at present. Nonetheless, in other parts of the world, terrorist organizations such as the Taliban and the FARC have emerged as major players in the international drug trade. Cutting off any and all sources of funding for terrorist organizations operating in West Africa is an important U.S. national security goal. To accomplish this goal, the United States needs to learn more about the links between terrorist and drug trafficking organizations in the region.

Recommendation: U.S. government agencies – particularly DEA – should assist West and North African authorities in mapping the specific local and international drug trafficking and terrorist organizations operating in each country and how they interact with one another. Without a clear understanding of these details, it is difficult to adequately address the security situation in the region.

STRENGTHEN THE WEST AFRICA COOPERATIVE SECURITY INITIATIVE AND DEVELOP A REGIONAL INTERDICTION STRATEGY

2. **Finding:** Recognizing the threat posed by drug traffickers and transnational criminal organizations, the State Department launched the West Africa Cooperative Security Initiative (WACSI) in 2011 with the intent of providing \$60 million in assistance over five years.⁶ WACSI serves as the primary U.S. security and counternarcotics assistance program in the region. Senior U.S. officials meet on an ad hoc basis to develop strategies for WACSI. A staff-level working group also meets on an ad hoc basis.

U.S. officials selected three “spotlight projects” that were funded by WACSI in 2012. Funding was provided for a vetted counternarcotics unit in Nigeria, an anti-corruption commission in Sierra Leone and a regional training center in Ghana. WACSI is an excellent start, but it needs to be strengthened.

Recommendation: Rather than meeting on an ad hoc basis, senior officials from the State Department, DEA, U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) and other relevant agencies should establish a regular meeting schedule to coordinate security assistance to West Africa. This interagency group should continue to select “spotlight projects” on an annual basis.

The Caucus believes that this interagency group should also develop a regional interdiction strategy. While DEA should continue to remain the principal agency tasked with working with host countries to target drug kingpins, the WACSI working group should also develop an interagency interdiction strategy that prioritizes the individuals and organizations to be targeted, especially those traffickers with ties to terrorist organizations. The WACSI working group should regularly report to Congress on its progress in combatting the West African drug trade. The regional interdiction strategy must be complemented by a strategy to help enhance the rule of law and provide other assistance to West Africa, within U.S. budgetary constraints.

Working together, we believe that the State Department, DEA and AFRICOM can help break the back of the narcotics trade in West Africa.

PASS THE TRANSNATIONAL DRUG TRAFFICKING ACT OF 2013

3. ***Finding:*** On April 11, 2013, Senators Feinstein and Grassley – along with Senators Blumenthal, Heitkamp, Klobuchar, Tom Udall and Wyden – introduced the *Transnational Drug Trafficking Act of 2013* (S. 706). This bill – which passed the Senate unanimously during the 112th Congress – would enhance DEA’s authority to combat international drug trafficking by establishing penalties for drug trafficking activity when potential defendants have *reasonable cause to believe* that illegal drugs will be trafficked into the United States. This would help DEA and the Department of Justice build extradition cases targeting drug kingpins who use intermediaries to ship illegal narcotics here. In the West African context, this law could be used to target drug kingpins who traffic illegal narcotics, including heroin and methamphetamine, through the region en route to the United States.

While cocaine trafficked through West Africa usually does not reach the United States, small amounts of heroin and methamphetamine precursor chemicals *are* trafficked through the region and into the United States. Enactment of this legislation will create a critical additional tool for prosecuting drug trafficking crimes, both in West Africa and globally.

Recommendation: Congress should quickly pass and the President should sign into law the *Transnational Drug Trafficking Act of 2013*.

BLOCK WEST AFRICAN TRAFFICKERS' ACCESS TO THE U.S. FINANCIAL SYSTEM BY ADDING THEM TO TREASURY DEPARTMENT KINGPIN LIST

4. ***Finding:*** The Treasury Department can block drug traffickers and money launderers from accessing the U.S. financial system by adding them to its list of Specially Designated Narcotics Traffickers. Doing so prohibits Americans from conducting financial or commercial transactions with these individuals, and freezes any assets they have in the United States or under U.S. jurisdiction.

For decades, the Treasury Department has frozen the assets of Mexican drug kingpins in an effort to dismantle their trafficking organizations. For example, on June 12, 2013, it announced that it was freezing the assets of individuals and entities linked to Rafael Caro Quintero, the Mexican drug trafficker convicted of the 1985 murder of DEA agent Enrique Camarena.⁷ This action followed the release of Caro Quintero from prison in Mexico. Caro Quintero himself was designated by the Treasury Department as a narcotics trafficker in 2000 and remains on the list.⁸

Recommendation: The Treasury Department should prioritize adding drug traffickers operating in West Africa to its list of Specially Designated Narcotics Traffickers.

PRIORITIZE THE TARGETING OF FINANCES OF TRANSNATIONAL CRIMINAL GROUPS IN WEST AFRICA

5. ***Finding:*** As in other parts of the world, drug traffickers and terrorist organizations in West Africa are motivated primarily by the profits generated by trafficking in illicit narcotics.

As the multi-agency takedown of the Lebanese Canadian Bank demonstrated, targeting the financial activity of transnational criminal organizations is one of the most effective ways to disrupt their operations and deny them the proceeds of their crimes.

This joint investigation – spearheaded by the Treasury Department, DEA and other agencies – began in South America in 2006. As described above,

by following money trails and electronic communications, the Treasury Department was able to shut down the Lebanese Canadian Bank for its role in the money laundering scheme that funded Hezbollah. In the scheme, used cars from North America were sold in West Africa. These profits were then mixed with proceeds from cocaine sales in West Africa and routed through the Lebanese Canadian Bank, with a portion of the involved funds diverted to Hezbollah. The bank has paid a \$102 million fine to settle a lawsuit with the Justice Department and is now defunct.⁹

Recommendation: U.S. law enforcement agencies should prioritize and devote sufficient resources, within present budgetary limits, towards the targeting, investigating and sanctioning of drug traffickers operating in West Africa, in particular with regard to their illicit finances. The Lebanese Canadian Bank investigation and associated enforcement actions should serve as a model for future interagency cooperation.

CREATE ADDITIONAL SENSITIVE INVESTIGATIVE UNITS

6. **Finding:** Sensitive Investigative Units (SIUs) are highly-trained, vetted law enforcement units that DEA trains and collaborates with in select countries throughout the world. SIUs are considered the “gold standard” of vetted police units. Each SIU member is subjected to a polygraph examination, a full background check and drug testing. Members must pass Leahy Law vetting requirements, meaning that their backgrounds are checked to ensure that they have not committed past human rights violations. In addition, members are required to successfully complete specialized training conducted by U.S. personnel both in host countries and in the United States. SIUs are provided with U.S. equipment and logistical support, and their salaries are supplemented with a pay stipend for their participation in the unit. The SIU concept has proven to be effective in other countries with significant drug trafficking problems, including Afghanistan, Thailand, Colombia and Mexico. DEA also trains additional vetted police units throughout the world that are not SIUs. These units do not receive as extensive training in the United States and in their host countries. The U.S. currently has an SIU in Ghana and an additional vetted police unit in Nigeria to help address drug trafficking in West Africa.

Recommendation: The SIU model should be replicated on an as-needed basis in West Africa, within budgetary constraints. The Caucus requests that

DEA and the State Department present Congress with a written assessment of where in West Africa SIUs are most needed and where they would be most effective and welcomed by host country counterparts. Once this assessment is completed, Congress should work with DEA and the State Department to use existing funds to create additional SIUs.

EXPAND CLANDESTINE METHAMPHETAMINE LABORATORY TRAINING TO WEST AFRICA

- 7. *Finding:*** DEA has documented the emergence of West Africa – and in particular Nigeria – as a point of origin for large methamphetamine shipments destined for the Far East.¹⁰ As one example, in June 2011, a methamphetamine lab was seized in Nigeria which was estimated to be capable of producing up to 440 pounds of methamphetamine per week.¹¹ With wholesale prices ranging from about \$40,000/kilogram in Malaysia to as much as \$200,000/kilogram in Japan and the Republic of Korea, one week’s production from this lab could have a street value ranging from approximately \$8 million to \$40 million in the lucrative Southeast Asian market.¹² In addition, Mexican drug trafficking organizations are participating in the methamphetamine trade and have been linked to criminal groups operating throughout West Africa.¹³ With large profits available from exporting methamphetamine to East Asia and weak governmental and law enforcement institutions in West Africa, the manufacture of methamphetamine in clandestine labs there can be expected to increase in the years to come.

Based on the U.S. experience with clandestine methamphetamine laboratories, an increase in the number of laboratories in West African countries may expose law enforcement officials and first responders to toxic chemicals which could result in injury or death, if these individuals are not properly trained. When called upon, first responders must ensure that these clandestine methamphetamine laboratories are investigated, dismantled, and that the chemicals and equipment are disposed of properly. U.S. experience has demonstrated that first responders and law enforcement officers are often exposed to toxic heavy metals and gases when entering methamphetamine labs, which can lead to serious injury and death.

Recommendation: Using existing funds, DEA should invite vetted individuals from West African governments to participate in its Basic Clandestine Laboratory Certification School and its First Responder/

Awareness Training. These programs are offered to government officials from throughout the world and would be particularly useful for officials from West African countries where methamphetamine laboratories have been found and are expected to increase.

**ENCOURAGE COUNTRIES TO MEET UNITED NATIONS
OBLIGATIONS ON PRECURSOR CHEMICALS USED FOR
METHAMPHETAMINE PRODUCTION**

8. ***Finding:*** In response to an increase in suspicious shipments of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine to countries in Africa, Central and South America and West Asia, the United Nations and the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) initiated *Operation Crystal Flow*, a global initiative to monitor the international trade of precursor chemicals between the Americas, Africa, and West Asia.¹⁴ During the course of the six-month operation, 35 suspicious shipments were identified, totaling 53 metric tons of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine with a street value of approximately \$80 million.¹⁵ These shipments – all of which were either stopped or seized – were estimated to be capable of producing 48 tons of methamphetamine.¹⁶ **The majority of these suspicious shipments were sent to or smuggled through Africa. *Operation Crystal Flow* highlights the emergence of Africa as a major precursor transit point and stockpile location of essential precursor chemicals bound for Mexico.**

In response to the operation, the INCB urged all exporting countries and transit countries to detain shipments of precursor chemicals until the legitimacy of those shipments could be confirmed pursuant to requirements under international treaty requirements.¹⁷

Although virtually all African countries have ratified the United Nations Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988 – which places specific limits on the diversion of precursor chemicals – most fail to fulfill their treaty obligations. For example, most African countries do not submit statistics on imports and exports of pseudoephedrine, ephedrine and other precursor chemicals to the INCB.¹⁸ These countries also do not monitor legal chemical production or the manufacture of medical preparations containing these chemicals, all in violation of their commitments under the 1988 Convention.¹⁹

Recommendation: With increasing evidence that precursor chemicals are being shipped through West Africa or exported directly to West African countries for use in methamphetamine production, the Obama Administration should encourage its West African partners to meet their reporting obligations under the 1988 Convention.

In addition to these reporting requirements, the INCB has routinely highlighted the benefit of invoking Article 12 of the 1988 Convention. Article 12 requires, among other things, exporting countries to inform importing countries of shipments of precursor chemicals *before* they arrive.²⁰ To assist countries with providing pre-export notification, the INCB has developed an electronic tool, the PEN Online System.²¹ However, the vast majority of West African governments have neither invoked Article 12 nor adopted the PEN Online System. The United States should strongly urge these countries to adopt these measures.

Background

Why Should We Care?

Over the last three years, the Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control has released bipartisan reports focused on U.S. policies towards Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean and Afghanistan, along with reports on money laundering and drug demand reduction. This report – a follow-up to a May 16, 2012 hearing – focuses on countering narcotics threats in West Africa.

Before exploring the nature of the problem, it is important to ask why the United States should care about it. After all, cocaine transiting through West Africa is, for the most part, destined for Europe, and methamphetamine produced in the region is typically shipped to Asia.

There are four main reasons why combating the narcotics trade in West Africa is in the national security interest of the United States:

- (1) **First**, the same Latin American drug trafficking organizations that smuggle cocaine and other illegal drugs into the United States are operating in West Africa, particularly the FARC and other criminal groups in Colombia. As we support the Colombian government in combating the FARC – even as the government seeks negotiations as well – it is certainly not in our interest to see that organization enriched through illicit activities in West Africa. The same is true of Mexican drug trafficking organizations. **A detailed description of these groups' activities is provided on page 17.**
- (2) **Second**, drug trafficking in West Africa provides financing to dangerous terrorist organizations that pose a threat to the United States and its allies, including AQIM and Hezbollah.
- (3) **Third**, methamphetamine and related precursor chemical traffic transiting the region is largely unregulated. The origins and destinations of these controlled substances are often unknown and may include the United States.

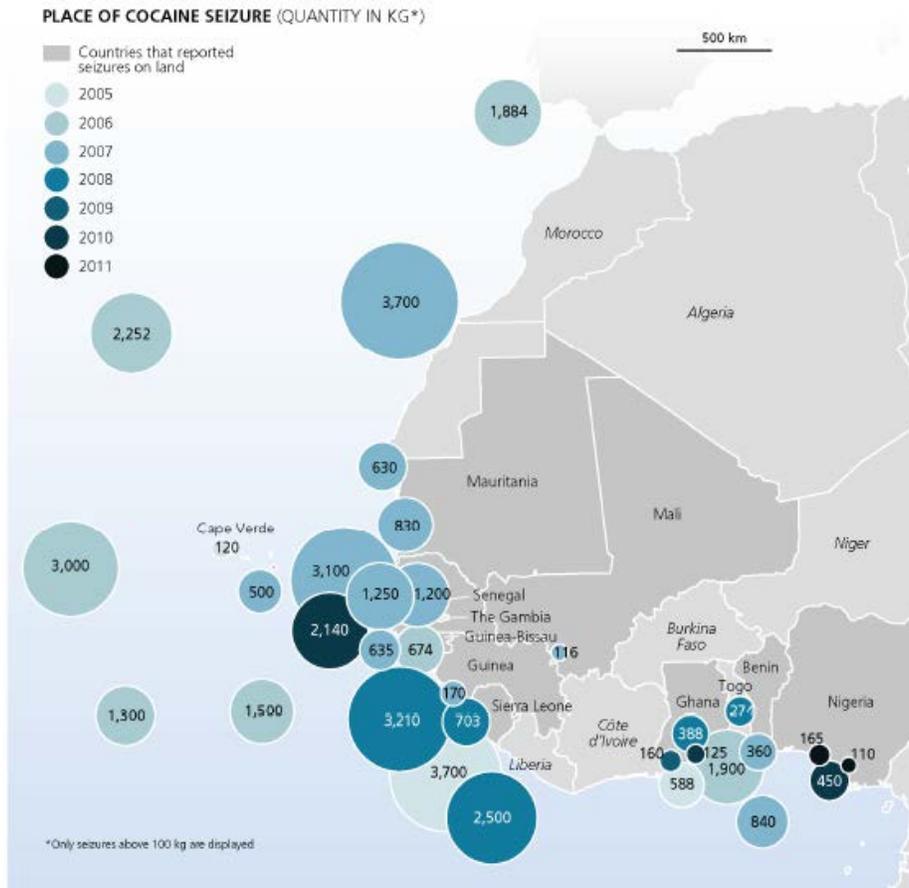
(4) **Fourth**, West Africa is a relatively marginal but regular source of heroin trafficked into the United States. Indeed, criminal groups from West Africa are involved in the global heroin trade.

Scope of the Problem

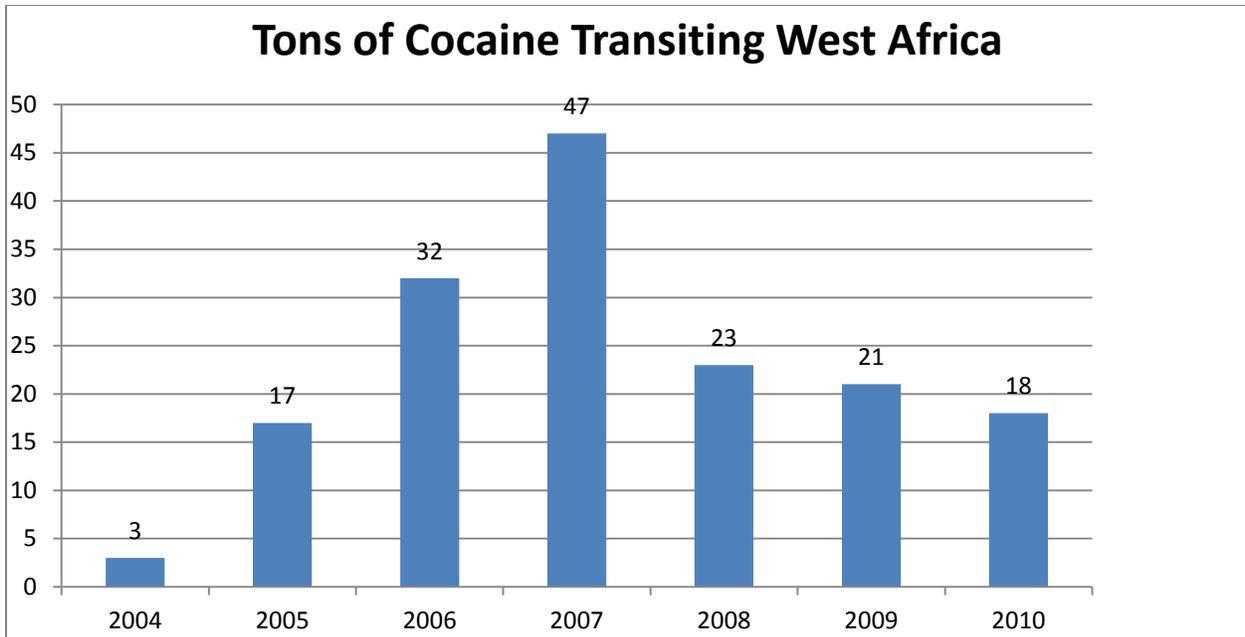
Since 2004, as the European demand for cocaine has increased, West Africa has emerged as a major transit point for illegal drugs from South America destined for Europe. According to the Congressional Research Service, there are **three main reasons for West Africa's emergence as a key transit point for cocaine and other narcotics**:

- (1) Increasing European demand for cocaine;
- (2) Stagnating North American cocaine use; and
- (3) Increased interdiction of narcotics in the Western Hemisphere.²²

A map created by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) that illustrates major cocaine seizures in West Africa between 2005 and 2011 is pictured below:



The flow of cocaine through West Africa peaked in 2007, when 47 tons of cocaine flowed through the region. The flow of cocaine dropped to 18 tons in 2010, which would still be worth \$1.25 billion wholesale in Europe.²³ According to the UNODC, “it does not take a lot of cocaine to cause trouble” in these West African nations since “the entire military budget of many West African countries is less than the wholesale price of a ton of cocaine in Europe.”²⁴



Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, February 2013

Cocaine first came from South America to West Africa in large boats, sometimes in the form of multi-ton shipments. In recent years, however, cocaine has reached West Africa increasingly through private aircraft and commercial container ships.²⁵ According to the UNODC, the type of aircraft used to transport narcotics from South America to West Africa has evolved:

“The aircraft used have grown progressively more sophisticated over time, from twin-engine propeller planes to commercial jets, capable of carrying multi-ton loads. Most of these have departed from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. At the same time, smaller shipments, within the range of West African groups, have been found secreted in maritime shipping containers. There is also traffic in much smaller amounts via commercial air couriers and the post, much of which appears to proceed from Brazil.”²⁶



*Pictured above is a cocaine-filled 727 aircraft which departed from Venezuela and landed in Gao, Mali in October 2009. The plane became stuck in the sand and was burned on the spot.
Source: Drug Enforcement Administration*

While West Africa's geographical position between South America and Europe certainly helps to account for its increasing use as a drug transit zone, the region also has a number of specific vulnerabilities which make it more prone to drug trafficking. According to the Congressional Research Service, these include:

- Poor internal transport and communications systems;
- Porous land and maritime borders;
- Lack of maritime, air and land surveillance and interdiction technical capacities;
- Weak law enforcement and judicial systems;
- Limited state regulatory controls and administrative capacities; and
- High rates of poverty and unemployment.²⁷

As in Central America, drug traffickers in West Africa take advantage of weak governance and unenforced laws in order to thrive.

Who Are the Traffickers?

Latin American drug trafficking organizations have partnered with local criminal groups in West Africa to transport cocaine from the region into Europe. According to DEA, “Colombian and Venezuelan traffickers are entrenched in West Africa and have cultivated long-standing relationships with African criminal networks to facilitate their activities in the region.”²⁸

According to a recent report by David Brown, a visiting scholar at the Africa Center for Strategic Studies, Latin American drug trafficking organizations often “send lieutenants to open legitimate businesses in West African nations in order to obtain their legal residency papers, and start the process of setting up local illegal networks and front companies to facilitate drug trafficking.”²⁹ While DEA has identified the Colombian FARC as being involved in drug trafficking in West Africa, that is just one among many other smaller Colombian and Venezuelan trafficking groups active in the region.

Latin American drug trafficking organizations tend to partner with local criminal syndicates throughout West Africa. Nigerian-dominated groups are particularly strong and are active in more than 80 countries, with their activities including but not limited to illegal drug trafficking.³⁰

Finally, while the activity of Mexican drug trafficking organizations in West Africa is limited, there are examples – as seen below – of their presence there, particularly in the case of Los Zetas.

Drug – Terror Nexus

Terrorist organizations also play a role in the drug trade in West Africa. While briefings received by Caucus staff indicate that terrorist organizations are not the primary actors involved in drug trafficking in the region, they are certainly financed in part by the drug trade. This is of great concern to the Caucus, as we have seen the impact that the illegal drug trade can have on funding acts of terror by the Taliban in Afghanistan.

David Brown asserts that “criminal enterprises are evolving into new hybrid organizations that blur the traditional distinctions between organized crime and terrorism.”³¹ He points to three main terrorist groups with links to the drug trade in

West Africa: the FARC, AQIM and Hezbollah. **Below are examples of these links.**

First, in 2010, Mauritanian authorities reported that members of AQIM provided security for a convoy of cocaine and marijuana.³² Even experts more skeptical of direct AQIM involvement concede that the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa, an AQIM splinter group, is linked to hashish and cocaine trafficking in Niger and Mali.³³

Second, in 2011, Ayman Joumaa, a Lebanese drug kingpin linked to Hezbollah, was indicted in U.S. federal court for coordinating the sale of cocaine to Los Zetas, a prominent Mexican drug trafficking organization, by using West Africa to launder huge amounts of drug money, likely up to \$200 million a month.³⁴

Third, in December 2009, three West African Al Qaeda associates were arrested on drug and terrorism charges in Ghana and extradited to the United States. The individuals agreed to transport cocaine through West and North Africa with the intent to support Al Qaeda, AQIM and the FARC. All three defendants pled guilty and one of the defendants was sentenced to 57 months in prison.³⁵

The Caucus believes that U.S. government agencies – particularly DEA – should assist West and North African authorities in mapping the specific local and international drug trafficking and terrorist organizations operating in each country and how they interact with one another. Without a clear understanding of which actors are operating where, it is difficult to adequately address the security situation in the region. Existing WACSI resources should support this effort.

U.S. authorities have the legal tools to prosecute extraterritorial drug trafficking, but these tools can be enhanced. As DEA Deputy Administrator Thomas Harrigan stated during his May 16, 2012 testimony before the Caucus, DEA “has the legal authority to investigate and charge drug traffickers with extraterritorial offenses” under Title 21, Section 959 of the U.S. Code.³⁶ This statute provides DEA with the ability to investigate and prosecute drug offenses with a nexus to the United States, even if the drugs at issue do not actually enter the United States. In addition, Title 21, Section 960a gives DEA the jurisdiction to investigate and prosecute extraterritorial drug offenses if a link between an offense and either a specified act of terrorism or a terrorist organization can be established.

On April 11, 2013, Senators Feinstein and Grassley – along with Senators Blumenthal, Heitkamp, Klobuchar, Tom Udall and Wyden – introduced the *Transnational Drug Trafficking Act of 2013 (S. 706)*. This bill – which passed the Senate unanimously during the 112th Congress – would enhance DEA’s authority to combat international drug trafficking by establishing penalties for drug trafficking activity when individuals have *reasonable cause to believe* that illegal drugs will be trafficked into the United States. **This would help DEA and the Department of Justice build extradition cases targeting drug kingpins who use intermediaries to ship illegal narcotics to the United States.**

While cocaine trafficked through West Africa usually does not reach the United States, small amounts of heroin and methamphetamine precursor chemicals *are* trafficked through the region and into the United States. **Enactment of this legislation will create a critical additional tool for prosecuting drug trafficking crimes, both in West Africa and globally.**

Guinea-Bissau: West Africa’s Narco-State

Once hailed as a potential model for African development, Guinea-Bissau is now considered Africa’s most fragile state and is the main transit point for illicit drug trafficking through West Africa.³⁷ Most of the 13 percent of the world’s cocaine flow through West Africa is trafficked through Guinea-Bissau.³⁸ While it is impossible to know the exact amount, the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime estimates 30 to 35 tons of cocaine are trafficked through Guinea-Bissau per year.³⁹ **According to Director of National Intelligence James Clapper, “Guinea-Bissau has become a narco-state, where traffickers use the country as a transit hub with impunity.”⁴⁰**

Guinea-Bissau’s current situation is the result of decades of political turmoil. Since the country gained independence in 1974, a stable political system with political parties and democratic checks and balances has not evolved. Instead, the military has become increasingly involved in politics, and power has become concentrated in the executive branch. In addition, law enforcement capabilities remain weak. Indeed, as one example, there is often not enough gasoline available in Guinea-Bissau for police vehicles.

The flow of cocaine through the country is both a result of and contributor to this instability. Since roughly 2005, traffickers have been capitalizing on Guinea-Bissau’s fragility and ideal geography to transport Latin American cocaine to

European markets. As trafficking has increased, so has drug-fueled political competition and corruption.⁴¹ Following a military coup d'état in April 2012, the situation dramatically worsened.

The international community has increasingly isolated Guinea-Bissau. In response to the April 2012 coup, the United Nations Security Council imposed travel bans on the military officers who seized power there. The European Union also imposed travel bans and froze assets of reigning military junta members.⁴² Elections are slated to be held there on March 16, 2014.

U.S. Security Assistance to West Africa

West Africa Cooperative Security Initiative

Recognizing the threat posed by drug traffickers and transnational criminal organizations, the United States provides a range of counternarcotics support to African partner nations. **In 2011, the State Department launched WACSI in response to the increase in cocaine trafficking through West Africa and organized crime in the region.**

Following a visit to West Africa by a senior U.S. delegation – including Assistant Secretary of State for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs William Brownfield, DEA Administrator Michele Leonhart and former Assistant Attorney General Lanny Breuer – and talks with partner nations, **WACSI was intended to advance five strategic goals:**

- Establishing effective and modern anti-crime policies and legal frameworks through technical assistance to draft new laws, guidance to enact such laws, and support to improve public awareness of anti-crime policies;
- Strengthening security and law enforcement operations to target illicit networks, including support to elite counternarcotics units, operational and basic law enforcement skills training, provisions of relevant equipment, and institutional capacity building;
- Reinforcing justice sector institutions through technical assistance for prosecutors and judges involved in complex transnational crime cases;
- Supporting government and civil society institutions through technical assistance and capacity building; and
- Addressing the socio-economic dimensions of illicit activity, including drug demand reduction and raising public awareness about transnational organized crime.⁴³

WACSI was designed as a five year, \$60 million effort and operates through two interagency groups. A senior WACSI Coordination Group consists of high

level officials, including many in the 2011 delegation, and meets on an as needed basis. WACSI also has an inter-agency Working Group that targets foreign assistance to West Africa by selecting so-called “spotlight projects.”⁴⁴ The Working Group includes participants from the State Department, DEA and U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM).

In August 2012, the Working Group identified a Regional Training Center in Ghana, a vetted unit in Nigeria and an anti-corruption commission in Sierra Leone as spotlight projects.⁴⁵ These programs are now operating to build stronger institutions to fight the drug trade in the region. For example, the West Africa Regional Training Center has trained approximately 400 officials from ten countries in the region since it opened in January 2013, while the Nigerian vetted unit has seized nearly 640 kilograms of methamphetamine since its inception. In Sierra Leone, the anti-corruption commission has increased investigations by 80 percent and doubled the number of convictions. In addition to these programs, a regional legal advisor has been deployed to Benin to assist with the adjudication of transnational criminal cases.

The chart below provides an overview of the activities funded through WACSI in FY 2012:

West Africa Cooperative Security Initiative Funding for FY 2012

<u>Activities</u>	<u>Funding</u>
West Africa Regional Programs	\$13,800,000
Liberia Programs	\$17,000,000
Anti-Crime Programs	\$1,232,000
Demand Reduction/Drug Awareness	\$806,000
International Law Enforcement Academies	\$6,600,000
TOTAL	\$39,438,000

Source: U.S. Department of State

Drug Enforcement Administration Efforts

DEA employs a dual track approach to counternarcotics efforts in West Africa by training partner nation law enforcement entities and supporting targeted operations to disrupt drug trafficking in the region. DEA currently operates out of two West Africa regional offices in Lagos, Nigeria and Accra, Ghana with a total budget of \$5.6 million in Fiscal Year 2012.⁴⁶ **Recognizing the importance of having a strong presence on the ground, DEA is slated to open a third office in Dakar, Senegal in 2014.**⁴⁷

As in other parts of the world, DEA's primary assistance role is in the formation, training and vetting of Special Investigative Units (SIUs) in West African partner nations.⁴⁸ These vetted units are the "gold standard" for U.S.-trained law enforcement units operating around the world. Each SIU member is subjected to a polygraph examination, a full background check, and drug testing, as well as Leahy Law vetting requirements to ensure that they have not committed human rights violations in the past. In addition, members are required to successfully complete specialized training conducted by U.S. personnel both in host countries and in the United States. SIUs receive U.S. equipment, logistical support, and a pay stipend. Currently DEA has set up one SIU in Ghana, a vetted unit in Nigeria and has funding for a third unit based in Kenya.⁴⁹

DEA is also operationally active in North and West Africa. For example, in April 2013, a DEA undercover operation led to the arrest and indictment of former high ranking Guinea-Bissau military officer Jose Americo Bubo Na Tchuto, as well as four others, on drug trafficking charges.⁵⁰

U.S. Department of the Treasury Efforts

The Department of the Treasury has taken a lead role in investigating and seizing the finances of groups trafficking drugs in West Africa, including Hezbollah. Transnational criminal organizations are involved in the drug trade to generate profit. Attacking the revenue streams they receive is critical to disrupting their criminal activities.

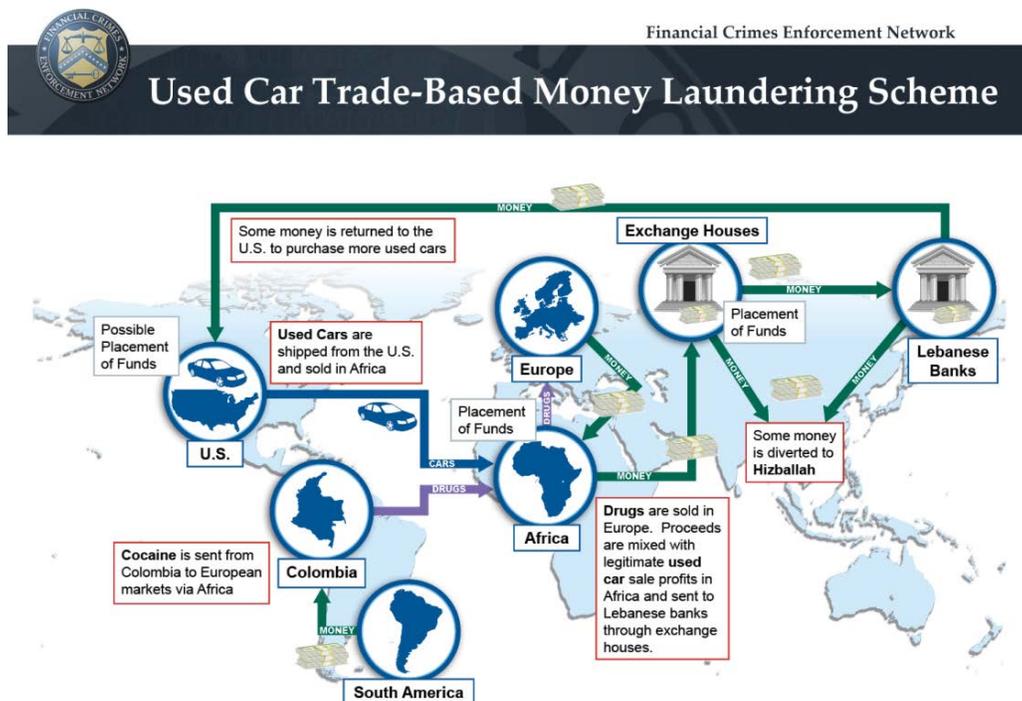
In February 2011, the Treasury Department announced sanctions against the Lebanese Canadian Bank because of "the bank's role in facilitating the money laundering activities of an international narcotics trafficking and money laundering network."⁵¹ As described above, in a complex scheme, Hezbollah operatives

bought used cars in the United States and then shipped them to West Africa for resale. Once the cars were sold in West Africa, the profits from these sales were comingled with Hezbollah’s proceeds from cocaine trafficking in Africa and Europe. These funds were then deposited into Lebanese financial institutions, with a portion going to Hezbollah.⁵²

This successful investigation and resulting sanctions effectively cut the Lebanese Canadian Bank off from the international financial system. By putting the bank out of business, the Treasury Department denied Hezbollah and other transnational criminal groups their proceeds from the West African drug trade.⁵³

This case is an excellent example of U.S. law enforcement efforts in the region. The Caucus recommends the continuation of similar, financially focused collaborative interagency operations to prevent the West African drug trade from financing criminals and terrorists. We also recommend that the Treasury Department prioritize adding drug traffickers operating in West Africa to its list of Specially Designated Narcotics Traffickers, which would block their access to the U.S. financial system.

Below is a summary from Treasury’s Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN) of the above-mentioned money laundering scheme:



Source: Financial Crimes Enforcement Network

Department of Defense Efforts

The Department of Defense has the largest footprint of any U.S. government component in West Africa and is crucial to our counternarcotics mission in the region. With approximately 3,000 U.S. military trainers continent-wide in 2013, the Department of Defense presence in Africa is at its highest level to date.⁵⁴

U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) has instituted a number of programs to combat transnational organized crime in West Africa. These programs involve, among other things, working with law enforcement entities in partner nations to increase their operational capabilities and establishing anti-money laundering initiatives. AFRICOM also funds programs like the Immigration and Customs and Enforcement (ICE) mentorship program in Nigeria to enhance airport security and provides financial support for DEA vetted units in the region.

Due to increased security concerns in West Africa and the destabilizing effect of the illicit drug trade, AFRICOM has requested a shift in resources into the region.⁵⁵ The Fiscal Year 2013 AFRICOM counternarcotics budget of \$19.2 million includes approximately \$10 million targeted for West Africa.⁵⁶ This sum will be supplemented with an additional \$18 million in recognition of the region's growing needs.⁵⁷ The Caucus welcomes this shift in AFRICOM's resources to West Africa.

Summary

The Obama Administration has responded to the narcotics threat in the region through the establishment of WASCI, the purpose of which is to strengthen interagency cooperation between the State Department, law enforcement agencies and military entities working together to combat transnational organized crime.

However, the Caucus believes that short-term security concerns must be balanced with the longer term goals of strengthening the fragile law enforcement, judicial, and political institutions in West African nations. Ultimately, the efforts of the United States to counter the illegal narcotics trade in West Africa can only be successful through a sustained partnership with capable regional governments.

Beyond Cocaine: Emerging Drug Trends in West Africa

Overview

Beyond cocaine trafficked from South America to West Africa, the Caucus is concerned by recent trends that demonstrate an escalation in the region's role in the illicit drug trade. These trends include:

- (1) West Africa's emerging role as a **source of clandestine methamphetamine production**;
- (2) The use of West Africa as a **transshipment zone for precursor chemicals** used in the production of methamphetamine bound for North America; and
- (3) The role West African countries play in the **overland shipments of Afghan heroin bound for European and U.S. markets**.

West Africa's Role in Methamphetamine Production

Pierre Lapaque of the UNODC recently noted that West Africa is “shifting from a transit and consumer place to a producing place” and “**Nigerian criminal groups have quickly identified methamphetamine production as a niche.**”⁵⁸ **Nigerian laboratories are believed to produce methamphetamine for the lucrative Southeast Asian market where the drug can sell for as much as \$200,000 per kilogram.**⁵⁹

DEA has documented the emergence of West Africa as a significant point of origin for large methamphetamine shipments to the Far East.⁶⁰ For instance, in June 2011, a methamphetamine lab seized in Nigeria was estimated to be capable of producing up to 200 kilograms per week.⁶¹ In February 2012, a second operational lab was seized in Nigeria, along with 41 kilograms of ephedrine and almost five kilograms of methamphetamine.⁶² Notably, three Bolivian nationals were arrested at the site of this lab.⁶³ Investigations related to the seizure of both laboratories reveal that Mexican and South American drug trafficking organizations are playing a role in the African methamphetamine trade and have documented links to criminal groups operating in Nigeria, Ghana, Mozambique and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.⁶⁴



Pictured above is a methamphetamine laboratory discovered in Lagos, Nigeria in July 2011 with a capacity to produce 150 to 200 kilograms of methamphetamine per week.

Source: Nigerian National Drug Law Enforcement Agency

By April 2013, Nigerian law enforcement discovered its fifth illegal production center.⁶⁵ News reports at the time mentioned that a Colombian national had been linked to the establishment of multiple such laboratories, and had been arrested.⁶⁶

Precursor Chemicals for Methamphetamine Bound for North America

Since 2006, DEA estimates that sub-Saharan Africa has become a major transshipment point for precursor chemicals used in methamphetamine production destined for the Americas.

In response to an increase in suspicious shipments of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine to countries in Africa, Central and South America and West Asia, the United Nations and the INCB initiated *Operation Crystal Flow*, a global initiative to monitor the international trade of precursor chemicals between the Americas, Africa, and West Asia.⁶⁷ During the course of the six-month operation, 35 suspicious shipments were identified, totaling 53 metric tons of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine with a street value of approximately \$80 million.⁶⁸ These shipments – all of which were either stopped or seized – were estimated to be capable of producing 48 tons of methamphetamine.⁶⁹ The majority of these

suspicious shipments were sent to, or smuggled through, Africa. *Operation Crystal Flow* highlighted the emergence of Africa as a major precursor transit point and stockpile location of essential precursor chemicals bound for Mexico. In response to the operation, the INCB urged all exporting countries and transit countries to detain shipments of precursor chemicals until the legitimacy of those shipments could be confirmed pursuant to requirements under international treaty requirements.⁷⁰

Africa remains a major transit and destination point for precursor chemicals utilized in the production of methamphetamine. However, the overall picture of precursor chemicals entering the region is not very clear. In order to get a better understanding of the flow of precursors into the region, an international effort spearheaded by the INCB, *Operation Ephedrine and Pseudoephedrine Intelligence Gaps in Africa*, focused on the trade and diversion of precursor chemicals in Africa. Preliminary results indicate that precursor chemicals are not being diverted from legitimate international trade. Instead, the chemicals are being diverted from domestic sources or obtained through other illegal activities, including smuggling and thefts from companies.⁷¹

Heroin Trafficking

Heroin was initially trafficked from Afghanistan and other countries to Africa for local consumption, particularly South Africa, Egypt, Nigeria, Kenya, and Zambia. However, in recent years, East Africa has been used as a transit zone for heroin destined for consumers outside of Africa.

Once heroin arrives in East Africa, it is transported across the continent by private aircraft, over land, or by a combination of the two. Recent evidence suggests that Nigerian drug trafficking organizations have begun transporting heroin by land and air to Nigeria and other West African countries such as Benin and Ghana, to be trafficked on from there.⁷² The primary destination of this heroin is Europe, but a lesser amount is trafficked to North America. A second route to traffic heroin out of East Africa is over land to North Africa via Kenya, Ethiopia, and Sudan. The heroin is then moved from North Africa into Europe. While seizures of heroin transited through Africa have been made in the United States, they are usually very small, and are the product of individual drug mules. The Caucus is concerned that Afghan heroin transiting through Africa could appear in greater quantities in the United States.

Summary

To the extent that there is international attention on the West African drug trade, it is focused on the transit of cocaine from South America to Europe through the region. However, cocaine may well be just the beginning. The emerging trends cited in this section are likely to continue. In the coming years, methamphetamine and heroin produced in West Africa could easily appear in U.S. markets on a much larger scale.

Conclusion

At first glance, West Africa does not appear to be a region where the United States should be concerned about the drug trade. As this report has acknowledged, cocaine trafficked from South America through West Africa is typically headed to Europe, not the United States.

Yet, the movement of illegal drugs through West Africa has security implications for the United States, including the financing of terrorist organizations like AQIM, Hezbollah and the FARC. At the same time, it destabilizes countries and corrupts governments throughout the region.

The Caucus believes that existing resources can be used to partner with the countries of West Africa to combat drug trafficking and terrorist organizations in the region. Among the actions the Obama Administration and Congress can take are:

- Strengthening the West Africa Cooperative Security Initiative by developing a regional interdiction strategy that prioritizes the individuals and organizations to be targeted in West Africa, including drug traffickers with ties to terrorist organizations;
- Passing the *Transnational Drug Trafficking Act of 2013* (S. 706);
- Mapping the local and international drug trafficking organizations and terrorist groups operating in West Africa and how they interact with each other;
- Assessing where DEA SIUs are most needed and working with host country counterparts to establish them;
- Providing DEA-funded clandestine methamphetamine laboratory training to West African counterparts; and
- Encouraging West African partners to report to the United Nations on precursor chemicals for methamphetamine being transshipped through their countries.

Finally, in addition to demand reduction and interdiction efforts by law enforcement and the military, a critical component of any effective, long-term counternarcotics strategy, is economic development. Within current budgetary constraints, the United States should continue to support trade, alternative development and other programs that promote economic growth in West Africa.

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- ³ Testimony of Thomas Harrigan, Deputy Administrator of the Drug Enforcement Administration, before the Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control, May 16, 2012, pg. 9.
- ⁴ “Treasury Identifies Lebanese Canadian Bank Sal as a ‘Primary Money Laundering Concern,’” U.S. Department of the Treasury, February 10, 2011. <http://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/pages/tg1057.aspx>
- ⁵ Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control staff briefing with the Department of the Treasury, February 3, 2012.
- ⁶ Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control staff briefing with the Department of State, May 17, 2012.
- ⁷ “Treasury Sanctions the Network of Drug Lord Rafael Caro Quintero,” U.S. Department of the Treasury, June 12, 2013. <http://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/jl1981.aspx>
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- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. “Methamphetamine from West Africa to East Asia,” pg. 6. http://www.unodc.org/documents/toc/Reports/TOCTAWestAfrica/West_Africa_TOC_METH.pdf.
- ¹³ Testimony of Thomas Harrigan, Deputy Administrator of the Drug Enforcement Administration, before the Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control, May 16, 2012, pg. 3.
- ¹⁴ Precursors and Chemicals Frequently Used in the Illicit Manufacture of Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances: Report of the International Narcotics Control Board for 2007 on the Implementation of Article 12 of the United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988 (E/INCB/2007/4), pg. 6.
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
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- ¹⁷ United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988, Article 12.
- ¹⁸ Precursors and Chemicals Frequently Used in the Illicit Manufacture of Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances: Report of the International Narcotics Control Board for 2012 on the Implementation of Article 12 of the United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988 (E/INCB/2012/4), Map 1, pg. 2.
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- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, pg. 11.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, pg. 11.
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- ³⁰ Liana Wyler and Nicolas Cook, *Drug Trafficking in West Africa: Background and Possible Questions for an Upcoming Hearing*, Congressional Research Service, May 8, 2012, pg. 5.
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