



Institute of Islamic Strategic
& Socio-Political Affairs

Guinea Bissau: Africa's first "Narco State"

Resources, militancy and organised crimes
programme

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Source: <http://pulitzercenter.org/slideshows/guinea-bissau-worlds-first-narco-state-drug-trafficking-president-assassination>

Guinea Bissau has become Africa's first "Narco State", a title that threatens to further the countries' slide into insecurity and deepen poverty and inequality. A concerted regional effort is needed to empower weak security and governance structures in order to effectively combat the growing drug trade.

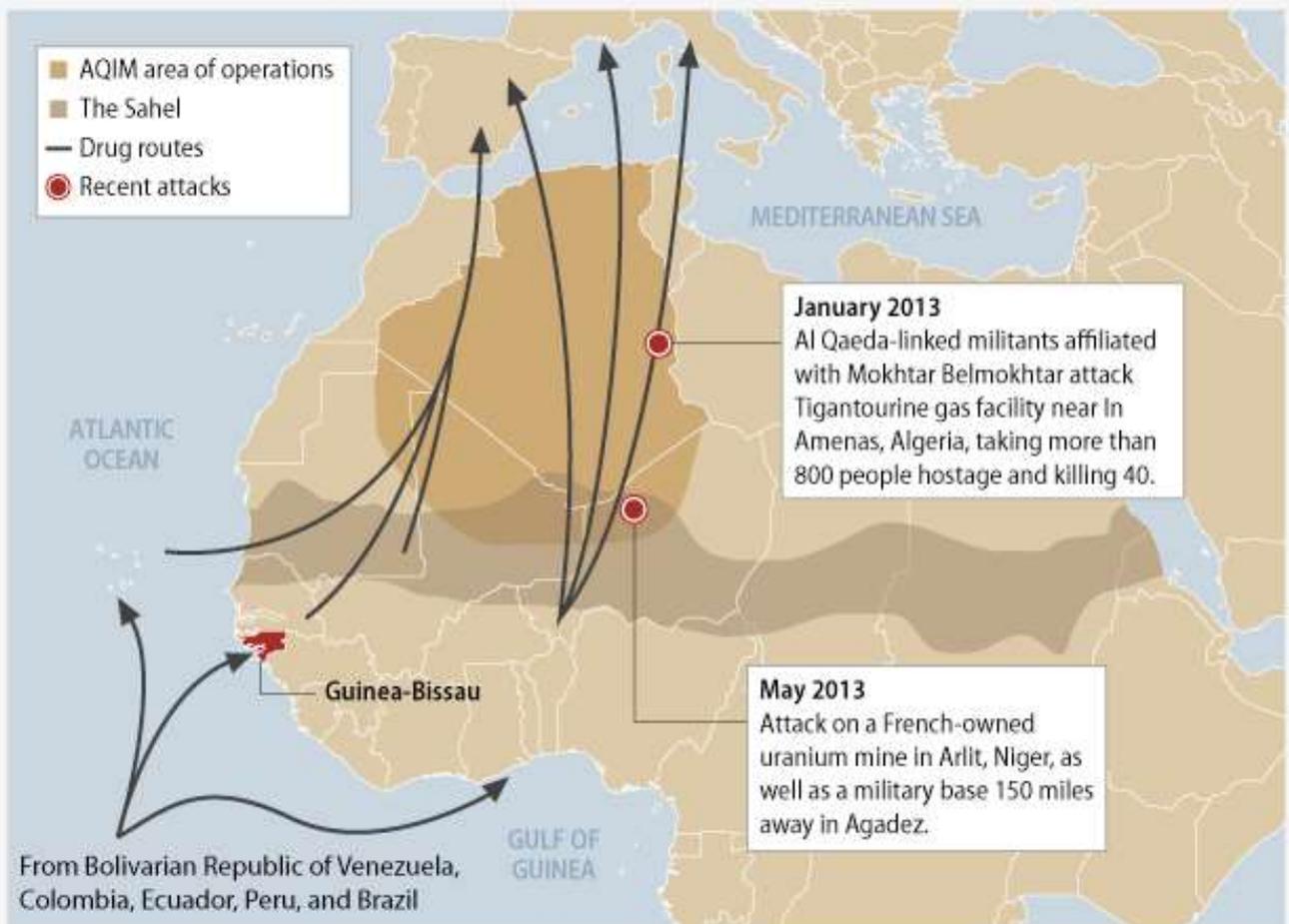
The small state of Guinea Bissau in West Africa has become increasingly the destination of drug carries from Latin America. As traditional transit routes into Europe are increasingly patrolled, cartels are turning to West Africa to move drugs into the region. Nicknamed “Highway 10” for its position on the 10th parallel north of the equator, Guinea Bissau is at the end of the shortest crossing of the

Atlantic from South America. As such a quarter of cocaine now consumed in Western Europe is transported through West Africa as the route provides a shorter and faster option. The rise in cocaine consumption in Europe has also contributed to this geographical shift in the drug’s supply route with Spain and Britain now consuming more cocaine per person than the United States.

FIGURE 1

West Africa and the Sahel

The South Atlantic drug trade shows signs of becoming further entwined with violent extremist networks in the region.



Source: Adam Scholl, “Map Room: Hidden Waters,” *World Policy Journal* (Winter 2012 / 2013), available at <http://www.worldpolicy.org/journal/winter2012/map-room>; United Nations; U.S. National Counterterrorism Center.
Note: All areas and routes marked are approximate.

The cocaine is securely stored and is then transported via boats to Portugal or Spain, overland to Morocco on the old cannabis trail or using “mules” placed on flights to Europe. The UNODC has also discovered that the country is increasingly used by Asian drug gangs to traffic Heroin across the Atlantic and into North America.

The proliferation of violence and state collapse that spread throughout West Africa in the 1990s sowed the seeds of violence and insecurity in which the narcotics trade had flourished. In 2008 the UN declared Guinea Bissau as the continent’s first “Narco state” a term which is likely to become as politically loaded as another of its titles, a “failed state”. The wealth that the drug trafficking has brought has been

concentrated in small pockets in the capital, making the crushing poverty in the world’s 5th poorest country even more apparent. The “get rich quick” appeal that the illegal drug trade offers has helped draw in scores of unemployed young people and members of the Police and armed forces whose complicity has been paramount to the rapid proliferation of the drug cartel’s trade in Guinea Bissau. Proceeds from the trade are laundered through legitimate real estate, fishing and

mining businesses making it increasingly difficult to trace. The spectre of addiction has also contributed to the downward spiral of society, as much like in Afghanistan; people have turned to drug use after the horrendous violence of the civil war. It has been estimated that as much as 30% of the younger generations of Guinea Bissau are now using

crack cocaine; the cheaper alternative to purer powdered cocaine.

The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) have explored how Europe’s thirst for cocaine is destroying society in West Africa, particularly Guinea Bissau. The fragile state of society after the civil war meant that exploitation by the cartels took root very quickly. Since 2003, 99% of drugs seized in Africa were found in West

Africa. Prior to 2003 around 600kg of cocaine was seized each year yet by 2006 this had increased five-fold and a single ship intercepted in late 2006 contained 2.4 tonnes of pure cocaine. In 2006, Guinea-Bissau’s gross domestic product (GDP) of US\$ 304 million equalled the wholesale value of six tons of cocaine in Europe highlighting just how lucrative the industry is in the tiny West African country.



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Of course seizures are only “the tip of the iceberg” according to UNODC but the rapid increase shows a worrying trend. The rampant corruption and absence of security has further facilitated the cartels who simply buy off government officials, a process made easier by the absence of foreign diplomats who left the country in 1998 after violence broke out and who now work out of neighbouring Senegal. The US however have reopened a diplomatic mission in 2013 in response to the rising cocaine trafficking and the links between those within Guinea Bissau’s government and FARC.



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The long term dangers in the country have been voiced by a government official who stated that the country could become the battle ground for Latin American and Asian drug cartels who fight for control of the geographically strategic country. Descent into the chaos witnessed in Honduras and El Salvador would not be far-fetched given the absence of rule of law and the general ambivalence of the international community.

The roadmap was drawn up in 2006 by the UNOCD aimed at helping Guinea Bissau’s government combat the illegal narcotics trade including the reform of security services and

judiciary and the construction of a prison. However the plan has only raised \$6.5 million of the \$19 million needed leaving a vast shortfall in security capabilities.

Findings from the UNODC 2008 World Drug report:

- The majority of air couriers come from Guinea, Mali, Nigeria, and Senegal. Guinea was the embarkation point for 221 couriers detected since 2006, the single largest national total in the region.
- In October 2008, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) adopted a declaration and regional action plan to combat drug trafficking and organized crime in West Africa. This has been backed by the UN departments of Political Affairs and Peacekeeping Operations. The plan aims to build national and regional law enforcement, border management and anti-money-laundering schemes.

Elections were held in Guinea Bissau in early April of this year. The former finance minister is predicted to be the likely winner. Jose Mario Vaz is a member of the dominant African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC). The elections were observed by 550 international observers and deemed fair. The peace and relatively accountability with which the elections were carried out is a

reassuring sign and despite no outright winner being declared there will be a run off on the 18th of May between Jose Mario Vaz and Nuno Gomes Nabiam who has the support of the military but is running as an independent. The elections are the first since the military coup of 2012 which was led by Antonio Indjai who has since been charged by the US for drug trafficking and attempting to sell surface to air missiles to FARC. This link shows how high up cooperation between government and drug trafficking goes. The transitional government has been pressured by the international community not to further postpone the election and heeded such calls in April yet have not responded to extradition requests from the US for Indjai.

No elected president has completed a five-year term since a war of independence from Portugal ended in 1976. Despite this turbulent past there is huge pressure for the country to remain stable as

investors are keen to tap into the countries as yet undeveloped natural resources which include bauxite, phosphate and offshore oil. The high voter turnout is encouraging with 80% of the electorate turning out to vote it sends a strong message that citizens want to move forward and engage politically. This must be answered by politicians who will no longer enable the cartels but who instead work with

ECOWAS and regional players to strengthen Guinea Bissau's governance structures.

Long term risks:

The power vacuum has not only allowed for the proliferation of weapons but also in groups who seek to challenge fragile democracies. The media storm created by the recent escalation of Boko Haram activity has turned the international communities' gaze upon terrorist activity in Nigeria and West Africa, yet how long this will last remains to be seen. It is reassuring that there is sufficient will to combat militant activity in West Africa but this

effort needs to be broadened its scope both geographically and to combat the organised crime which plagues the region and interlinks with militias and terrorist groups. Al-Qaeda and its regional offshoots are involved in the cocaine trade in West Africa earning millions which can then be used to purchase further weaponry

thus perpetuating the instability and state failure cycle. The exploitation of the vulnerable is another facet in the complex web of drug trafficking in West Africa and one that is likely to grow as drug addiction spreads through the country.

Ultimately, while there is still the demand for cocaine and heroin, the supply will continue.



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Where once Guinea was the main receiving country, it has now jumped to Guinea Bissau as efforts to stem the trade increased in Guinea. Therefore, individual countries must do more than simply enforce security within their own borders as cartels will simply move on to the next weak state. Joint task forces such as

ECOWAS could be the way to fight the cartels in country. However, the problems of Guinea Bissau must not be evaluated and judged in the context of someone else's security. A deep international commitment to addressing core socio-economic issue facing the country and the region may be the right way forward.

ABOUT OUR PROGRAMME: RESOURCES, MILITANCY AND ORGANISED CRIMES IN WEST AND HORN OF AFRICA

Brief Background and Scope

Africa's GDP is the most rapidly growing of any continent but corruption, crime, and militancy are rife. Much of this centres on the continent's wealth of natural resources, including petroleum etc. Foreign investment in Africa has grown exponentially over the last decade and will continue to rise. Consequently, foreign & African governments and criminal/militant groups' interests and sphere of influences will clash with increasing intensity over the coming years. This will have direct implications on energy, regional and global security agendas. Furthermore, areas such as West and Horn of Africa regions are strategically located, which enhances their role in the international trade system through shipping routes and transnational linkages etc. The creation of AFRICOM reflects the rising global importance of the region, with the exportation of oil only expected to drastically increase from the continent by 2025. Yet with the region still lacking institutions of effective governance and reliable security structures, the levels of violent insurgency have jeopardised economic development in countries such as Somalia, Ethiopia, Mali and Nigeria etc. Different militant groups finance their operations through employment of traditional criminal enterprises, such as smuggling and drug sales. Resources are also exploited for revenue by both criminal organisation and militant groups. Militant organisations such as Al-Shabab and other Jihadists and nationalist movement operating primarily in Somalia & Sahel – have exploited the security vacuum that exists in the regions. In addition, issues such as piracy continue to effect maritime security whilst increasing costs for counter-piracy measures.

The implications of above is severe on all three fronts i.e. Energy security, regional security and global security. To address these problems and develop solutions, we must now confront all three facets holistically, with due appreciation of their interrelated attributes.

Programme's Deliverables:

- ❖ Mapping the interplay between resources, militant groups and the dynamics of organised crime in West/horn of Africa.
- ❖ Conflict forecasting and risk analysis of the current and future dynamics of militancy, resources, organised crimes and their repercussions on energy security, regional and global security.
- ❖ Situation analyses on above issues, regional positioning and global powers interests etc.
- ❖ Alternative policy analyses that may serve in policy making on regional and global governance levels
- ❖ Creating a useful guide and knowledge base for stakeholders and public for future oil, gas and aid endeavours in West/Horn of Africa.

ABOUT US:

IISA is a think-tank and an intellectual forum for addressing the current and future dynamics of the Islamic-world and its interaction with Western civilisation. Based in London, IISA will create trans-Islamic and global reach. IISA seeks to establish a platform where Islamic-world's dynamics, trends, issue, problems or crises are analysed within the Islamic-world and by working on local models and realities and not against any external standards or perceptions. We will be one of the leading think-tank on the Islamic-world and its role in the contemporary global system. In a short span of time we have attracted great academic support and a reputation for both open and track-II dialogues. IISA is the only think tank initiative that goes beyond national and regional inclinations and addresses strategic and socio-political issues/crises of the Islamic-world in its totality. For more information i.e. our mission statement, current programmes and our academic and regional expertise please visit the following links:

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