

IS ISIS MAKING INROADS IN EAST AFRICA?

By Sarah Graveline

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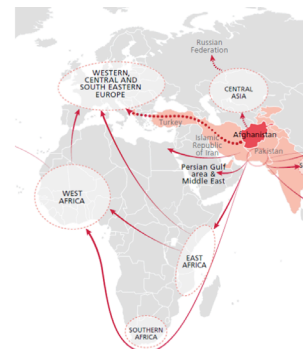
A member of a bomb disposal team prepares the scene before checking the bodies of three women who were shot dead by police outside the central police station in the coastal city of Mombasa, Kenya, Sunday, Sept. 11, 2016. The three women were killed by police after they attacked the police station using petrol bombs and knives, a police official said Sunday. (Source: AP Photo.)

Sarah Graveline is a Research Associate in the Africa Program at the Institute for Defense Analyses.

DRUG TRAFFICKING IN AFRICA: FROM TRANSIT ZONE TO CONSUMER MARKET?

By Dr. Ashley Neese Bybee

About 10 years ago, the international community became aware that Africa, in particular West Africa, had become a frequently used transit zone for criminal organizations trafficking cocaine from South America to Europe. Several large [seizures](#) involving African trafficking networks and drug-related [political instability](#) in several West African countries placed the continent on the radar of law enforcement officials and analysts alike. Perhaps as a result of the attention, West Africa appeared to [decline](#) as a major transit hub by 2009. Yet by 2013, [East Africa](#) (located on what some have coined the “Smack Track”) was attracting significant attention for its use as another transit zone for southwest Asian heroin en route to Europe. The latest World Drug Report indicates that West Africa may now be experiencing a [resurgence](#) in cocaine transiting the region, while other reports tell how the [production](#) of synthetic drugs is rising in Africa. Most of the discussion of the African drug trade has focused on its destabilizing effects on national politics and how it has eroded the rule of law through widespread corruption. Drug trafficking poses a multifaceted challenge to the continent, affecting not only politics and security but potentially also public health. [more...](#)



Main trafficking flows of heroin. Solid red line = southern route. Dashed red line = Northern route. Dotted Red line = Balkan route. (Source: Map adapted from “Executive Summary,” World Drug Report 2016, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, xiii. Map sources: UNODC, responses to annual report questionnaire and individual drug seizure database.)

Dr. Ashley Neese Bybee is a Research Staff Member in the Africa Program at the Institute for Defense Analyses.

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The Institute for Defense Analyses is a non-profit corporation operating in the public interest.

IDA's three federally-funded research and development centers provide objective analyses of national security issues and related national challenges, particularly those requiring scientific and technical expertise.

IDA's Africa team focuses on issues related to political, economic, and social stability and security on the continent.

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By Hilary Matfess

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Burnt-out vehicles outside a government building, following an election protest in Libreville, Gabon, Thursday, Sept. 1, 2016. (Source: AP Photo/Joel Bouopda.)

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A member of a bomb disposal team prepares the scene before checking the bodies of three women who were shot dead by police outside the central police station in the coastal city of Mombasa, Kenya, Sunday, Sept. 11, 2016. The three women were killed by police after they attacked the police station using petrol bombs and knives, a police official said Sunday. (Source: AP Photo.)

ISIS in East Africa: Estimating the Extent of the Network

The attempted Mombasa bombing appears to be the result of planning by existing extremist networks in Kenya. Although all three attackers [signed](#) pledges of loyalty to ISIS, they had ties to the larger jihadist milieu on Kenya's coast, which has traditionally affiliated itself with al-Shabaab. The attackers' ringleader, Tasmin Yakub, reportedly communicated with and potentially received financial assistance from [Hania Said Sagar](#), the widow of a radical [preacher](#) who led an al-Shabaab-affiliated organization in Kenya.

Although many Islamist extremist organizations in East Africa are [affiliated](#) with al-Shabaab, there is credible evidence that some of these organizations are also beginning to provide financial support to radicalized youth who wish to join ISIS. For example, Yakub, the Mombasa attack ringleader, lived with two Somali refugees who Kenyan police allege ran a [safe house](#) for both al-Shabaab and ISIS supporters. Similarly, in a March 2016 [report](#), the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD) noted the presence of a terrorist cell in Mombasa that raised funds for both al-Shabaab and ISIS.

These networks' willingness to support both ISIS and al-Shabaab recruits is likely due to the increasing number of radicalized East Africans interested in joining ISIS rather than al-Shabaab. As [Africa Watch](#) reported in May, Kenyan police arrested a group of Ugandan medical students in Nairobi who were allegedly part of a network planning biological attacks and sending recruits from across East Africa to fight with ISIS in Libya.

Although experts say the threat of a biological weapon was overblown, authorities and independent observers agree that groups of East Africans have [traveled to Libya](#) to fight with ISIS. Even though many more radicalized East Africans have joined al-Shabaab than ISIS, ISIS's narrative of global struggle is powerful. Moreover, joining ISIS can offer East African recruits a way to sidestep the regional politics inherent in joining al-Shabaab.

ISIS as an Alternative to al-Shabaab?

Rather than undertaking an effort to build up its own network in East Africa, ISIS seems to be attempting to leverage existing networks by seeking a merger with al-Shabaab. Within Somalia, however, al-Shabaab's leadership views support for ISIS as a threat. Starting in March 2015, ISIS addressed several messages directly to al-Shabaab's leadership, asking them to join ISIS. Al-Shabaab, which publicly pledged loyalty to al-Qaeda in 2012, has rejected these advances and suppressed dissenting views among its rank and file. In [September 2015](#), al-Shabaab reportedly detained a handful of its foreign fighters who had expressed support for ISIS. Throughout that year, al-Shabaab's internal security division [arrested or killed](#) other members who expressed pro-ISIS views.

Despite these harsh tactics, some fighters within al-Shabaab have continued to express support for ISIS. They tend to be young, and many are not ethnically Somali. As the 2016 IGAD [report](#) notes, these fighters feel threatened by the continued centralization of al-Shabaab's command structure and the marginalization and execution of foreign fighters at the hands of al-Shabaab's internal security wing. For these fighters, vocalizing support for ISIS is a way to register discontent with al-Shabaab's leadership without abandoning their ideological precepts. Some have even broken with al-Shabaab to pledge their loyalty to ISIS. For example, in October 2015, [Abdiqadir Mumin](#), a senior commander in Puntland, Somalia, left al-Shabaab to form his own militia that he declared was loyal to ISIS. In April 2016, a new group, calling itself [Jahba East Africa](#) and with [apparent ties](#) to Mumin, announced its support for ISIS.

ISIS has acknowledged these organizations through its media arm, which claimed its supporters carried out an [attack](#) against the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) in April 2016. The international community has recognized the threat posed by ISIS-linked organizations in Somalia, and on [August 31](#), Mumin was added to the State Department's designated terrorist list.

Despite the attention Mumin has garnered, he remains a relatively marginal figure. To date, he has failed to expand his organization's impact beyond three small attacks in Somalia. More significantly, ISIS has not created a formal province in East Africa, which suggests the terrorist organization is [not confident](#) that Mumin's forces are sustainable. Also, providing tangible support to potential affiliates in the region is at present a challenge for ISIS. Although Mumin's forces allegedly [received supplies](#) from ISIS-backed affiliates in Yemen, ISIS's [tenuous](#) position in Yemen challenges its ability to regularly provide supplies to Somalia.

Conclusion

While fear of ISIS's expansion into East Africa appears overblown, radicalized sympathizers present a threat even if they are not actively supported by ISIS. By piggybacking on the same networks that support al-Shabaab, ISIS supporters in East Africa can gain access to money and supplies needed to launch homegrown attacks. In copying ISIS's tactics, these supporters may also introduce and normalize types of attacks that were previously rare in East Africa. For example, al-Shabaab has traditionally declined to use female combatants, while ISIS and its affiliates, such as Boko Haram, have embraced female suicide bombers. The use of female assailants in the Mombasa attack may [signal a shift](#) toward the acceptance of female combatants in East Africa.

Overall, al-Shabaab maintains a strong regional network and has proved itself to be a resilient organization capable of successfully executing complex attacks outside Somalia. Currently, ISIS does not seem to have the capacity to compete directly with al-Shabaab. Despite this, ISIS remains attractive to some radicalized youth in the region, pulling recruits toward Libya and inspiring followers to attempt lone-wolf attacks. Efforts to stem the threat of terrorism in East Africa must therefore account for the risk of homegrown plots inspired by ISIS.

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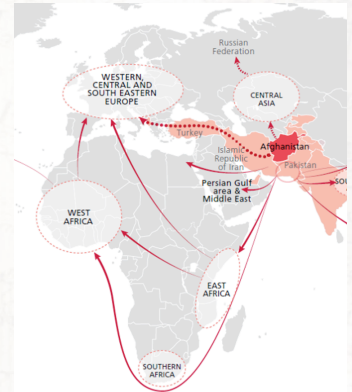
About 10 years ago, the international community became aware that Africa, in particular West Africa, had become a frequently used transit zone for criminal organizations trafficking cocaine from South America to Europe. Several large [seizures](#) involving African trafficking networks and drug-related [political instability](#) in several West African countries placed the continent on the radar of law enforcement officials and analysts alike. Perhaps as a result of the attention, West Africa appeared to [decline](#) as a major transit hub by 2009. Yet by 2013, [East Africa](#) (located on what some have coined the “[Smack Track](#)”) was attracting significant attention for its use as another transit zone for southwest Asian heroin en route to Europe. The latest World Drug Report indicates that West Africa may now be experiencing a [resurgence](#) in cocaine transiting the region, while other reports tell how the [production](#) of synthetic drugs is rising in Africa. Most of the discussion of the African drug trade has focused on its destabilizing effects on national politics and how it has eroded the rule of law through widespread corruption. Drug trafficking poses a multifaceted challenge to the continent, affecting not only politics and security but potentially also public health.

Concerns Persist on Narcoterrorism

To date, Africa has not had to contend with the type of drug violence that plagued Colombia in the 1980s or Mexico in recent years, where drug gangs battled for market domination. Rather, the security concern in Africa stems from the potential for narcoterrorism, where terrorist groups use the proceeds of drug trafficking, or simply drug taxing, to fund their operations. Early on, [Hezbollah](#) and [Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb](#) (AQIM) were most commonly cited as probable participants in Africa's drug trade. Today, the concern has expanded to the [Islamic State's](#) (IS) arm in Libya and [Boko Haram](#) in Northeastern Nigeria.

Over the course of 32 months (beginning in April 2013), [Italian authorities](#) seized more than 280 tons of hashish, valued at \$3.2 billion, on 20 large cargo ships bound for Libya. This was a significant deviation from the well-established hashish trafficking route from Morocco to Spain. The Italian anti-drug unit believes it is highly possible that IS, which until recently controlled several large port cities on Libya's coast, was taxing the lucrative shipments. Although the anti-drug unit lacks concrete evidence for this, such a hypothesis is consistent with IS's tactics in Syria and Iraq, where it is known not only to tax, but also to be involved in the production and trafficking of drugs.

In Nigeria, most analysts believe that [Boko Haram](#) is funded through an array of illicit activities including drug trafficking, though evidence is scarce and difficult to verify. According to [AFRIPOL](#), the African national police services' intelligence-sharing mechanism, the leader of Boko Haram, Abubakar Shekau, oversees a massive drugs and weapons-trafficking network. Boko Haram purportedly taxes weapons traffickers in and around the Lake Chad region in exchange for providing them with logistical support to transport heroin and cocaine shipments through Port Harcourt as well as the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and South Africa. This assertion was supposedly [confirmed](#) by detained Boko Haram militants. A more common association between Boko Haram and drugs is the militants' reported consumption of stimulants, including Viagra, which provides a means of maintaining the level of energy and motivation required for their ruthless attacks and enables them to maximize their number of rape victims. Evidence to support this notion includes the 2015 seizure of a [vehicle](#) allegedly transporting fuel and stimulant drugs for Boko Haram by the Nigerian military. Other [reports](#) suggest that Boko



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Haram's involvement in drug trafficking may extend as far as India, where the group has teamed up with Dawood Ibrahim, the leader of the Indian organized crime syndicate D-Company based in Mumbai.

A Public Health Problem

Drugs pose a potential threat not only to political stability in Africa, but also to public health. Although data are sparse, there is enough evidence to suggest that both West and East Africa have evolved from simply transit zones to regions where [consumption](#) and [production](#) are on the rise. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime ([UNODC](#)), using reported trend perceptions, finds that the use of opioids may have grown in Africa, while West Africa has reported above-average rate of use of crack cocaine (less expensive than the purer powder form). South Africa in particular has witnessed a significant increase in consumption of synthetic drugs. [Nyaope](#), for example, first appeared in Durban a decade ago and has since become prevalent in townships across the country. It is a mixture of low-grade heroin and marijuana cut with a variety of other substances, including cleaning detergents, rat poison, chlorine, or even antiretroviral drugs. At approximately \$2 for one hit, it is affordable for even the poorest South Africans. Consumption and addiction carry a bevy of social implications, including increases in prostitution (so that addicts can pay for their addictions), prevalence of HIV/AIDS (as a result of unprotected prostitution or sharing of needles for drug injection), and mortality rates. On a continent with limited capacity and resources, most African governments can ill afford the measures and solutions necessary to counter a drug epidemic.

Cooking on the Continent

Laboratories constructed for the production of synthetic drugs have also been found over the last 10 years, with several being discovered by authorities in [South Africa](#), [Nigeria](#), and [Guinea](#). They produce a variety of synthetics, including methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA or "Ecstasy") and [methamphetamine](#) ("meth"). Production of these drugs is relatively simple given the [lax regulation](#) by African countries of the precursor chemicals required to produce them. While the bulk of the product is destined for [Asia](#), a portion stays in country, contributing to local addiction. The profit earned by producers is huge, with one [report](#) stating that 1 kilo of meth costs around \$1,500 to make in West Africa but sells for around \$150,000 in Japan. Reports of [thefts and losses](#) of the precursor chemicals required to produce these drugs (ephedrine and pseudoephedrine) are another indication of drug production on the continent.

Conclusion

International attention to the drug trade in Africa appears to wax and wane in response to high-profile events or major shifts in the market. However, despite the scarcity of reliable data, there are suggestions that the trade has grown steadily over the last decade, with Africa's transit zones sprouting consumer markets for cocaine, opiates, and synthetic drugs. Not only do consumption and addiction represent potentially major public health challenges, but they also introduce new malicious "players" into African society in the form of local drug dealers or gangs. Furthermore, it seems plausible that terrorist organizations such as IS or Boko Haram are benefiting financially from this trade. The limited capacity of most African countries to contend with the threat to security and public health from the drug trade makes this challenge one that bears watching both on the continent and internationally.

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Patronage in Gabon

The issue in Gabon is deeper than merely electoral violence and a state crackdown in response. A system of patronage characterized by extended political terms and recycled elites, an election campaign marred by identity politics, and electoral irregularities have all played a role in stunting democratic consolidation. Unfortunately, these conditions are shared by a number of African countries. Examining Gabon's experience not only helps to place the country's current instability in context, but also sheds light on the state of democratization in other sub-Saharan African countries.

The 2016 election result, if it stands, will extend the Bongo family's 50-year rule. Omar Bongo, Ali's father, led the country from 1967 until his [death in 2009](#), when his son took the reins. This succession was eased by the powerful networks that Omar Bongo developed and reinforced through oil revenue and patronage.

The 2016 elections illustrate the depth of patronage in the country. Although Ali Bongo and Jean Ping, his opponent, are now bitterly opposed to one another, both of them owe their careers to the late Omar Bongo. Jean Ping's appointment to the African Union Commission as chairman and Ali Bongo's position as the minister of foreign affairs were the result of Omar Bongo's support.

In addition to his professional relationship with the Bongo family, Jean Ping is also connected to the family through marriage. Ping was [once married](#) to Ali Bongo's sister, with whom he had two children. In 2014, however, Ping turned on the Bongo family when he told *Le Monde*, "Gabon is a pure and simple [dictatorship in the hands of a family](#), a clan." The presence of such ruling families and long-term leaders has [stunted democratic development](#) throughout the region, and it has been linked to violence in [Kenya's](#) elections. The system of recycled elites in the Central African Republic, called the "[Bangui Carousel](#)," has been cited as central to the country's continued instability. In these countries just as in Gabon, political opposition is best seen as a struggle among elites rather than a competition among differing political outlooks and governing principles. This view was reflected in the campaign rhetoric of the 2016 elections in Gabon.

Identity Politics

Much of the 2016 campaign was focused on the nationality of the two candidates, rather than on discussing the serious challenges the country faces. Jean Ping argued that Ali Bongo was ineligible to run, asserting that he was born in Nigeria. It was alleged that Bongo's [birth certificate had been forged](#) to allow him to take over from his father.

Ali Bongo's campaign capitalized on Ping's Sino-Gabonese heritage to suggest that the Ping family is "[secretly serving Chinese interests](#)." In the past, Ping has embraced his heritage; he told Quartz. "This cultural mix had a profound impact on my childhood," arguing that "looking different" made him "[more open-minded](#)" and would make him a better leader. During the election, however, the Bongo campaign used Ping's heritage to cast doubt on his dedication to Gabon.



Burnt-out vehicles outside a government building, following an election protest in Libreville, Gabon, Thursday, Sept. 1, 2016. (Source: AP Photo/Joel Bouopda.)

The “birther allegations” levied at both candidates in Gabon are similar to the nationalistic electoral rhetoric in places like Côte d’Ivoire, where the concept of “[Ivoirité](#)” has been used to stymie political opposition. Such narrowly defined citizenship lends itself to political marginalization, which can be destabilizing.

Throughout the campaign in Gabon, such identity politics displaced important discussions about the country’s economy and development. Though Gabon has considerable oil wealth, youth unemployment is [35](#) percent and much of the country still lives in poverty. Engaging in rumor-mongering and casting aspersions on the other side’s heritage allow both camps to eschew responsibility for economic development and to ignore its highly unequal society.

Electoral Irregularities and Tepid Constitutional Courts

In Gabon’s 2016 elections, incumbent President Ali Bongo Ondimba was declared the winner by a margin of approximately 5,000 votes. This thin margin was made more controversial when the authenticity of the results from Bongo’s home district came into question. In the days following the electoral commission’s tally, opposition candidate Jean Ping demanded a [recount](#). The [African Union is sending a delegation](#), headed by Chad’s President Idris Deby, to address the contested elections, but few think the results will be overturned.

Like the 2016 elections, the 2009 elections were followed by rioting and a rejection of the results by the opposition and demands for a recount. The Constitutional Court conducted a recount that affirmed the results and placed Bongo in power. Such a sequence of events is not uncommon in sub-Saharan African elections; attempts to address electoral disputes through the judiciary in other countries have been unsuccessful. In [Uganda, Ghana, and Nigeria](#), courts have found irregularities in elections, but declined to overturn the results.

State Crackdown

Bongo’s government has responded to the protests through forceful repression and Internet censorship. Following the elections, the Internet was shut down for 104 hours, and since September 5 there has been an overnight, 12-hour “[internet curfew](#).” This curfew is similar to restrictions put on the Internet to stifle protests in [Ethiopia, Uganda, and Côte D’Ivoire](#).

Conclusion

According to the most recent Afrobarometer survey, 51 percent of Gabonese said they have no trust “at all” in the national electoral commission; more than 70 percent believe that votes in elections are “never” or only “sometimes” accurately counted. This lack of trust in the country’s electoral institutions should not be confused with political apathy or a lack of support for democracy—more than 75 percent of citizens polled “agree” or “agree very strongly” with this statement: “We should choose our leaders in this country through regular, open and honest elections.” Despite the support for open elections, the lack of trust in the independence and credibility of the country’s electoral watchdog could undermine the perceived quality of elections in Gabon. If left unaddressed, patronage systems, xenophobic campaign rhetoric, electoral fraud, and state repression might threaten to stymie democratization, both in Gabon and in other countries across the region.

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