

**MARITIME SECURITY IN AFRICA: ASSESSING
THREATS TO COMMERCIAL DIPLOMACY
AND NATIONAL SECURITY INTERESTS**

HEARING

BEFORE THE

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON AFRICA AND
GLOBAL HEALTH POLICY**

OF THE

**COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS
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WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2025—pm

U.S. SENATE,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON AFRICA
AND GLOBAL HEALTH POLICY,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:38 p.m., in room SD-419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Ted Cruz, chairman of the subcommittee, presiding.

Present: Senators Cruz [presiding], Booker, Shaheen, and Van Hollen.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. TED CRUZ, U.S. SENATOR FROM TEXAS

Senator CRUZ. Good afternoon. Thank you for joining us. This hearing is called to order.

Today's hearing focuses on China's dominance of maritime security in Africa and the importance of strengthening the U.S.-Africa partnership. As I have said before, I intend for this subcommittee to serve as the primary forum for shaping and articulating the policies of the United States toward Africa. I believe that fundamentally China is a global threat that must be confronted, region by region, territory by territory, and nation by nation. The challenges posed by China and Africa are vast. But there is also an immense opportunity for the United States and for American businesses to flourish.

In addition to Africa's natural resources, China seeks total control and dominance of Africa's rare earth minerals, its land, and its maritime ports. The Chinese Communist Party is executing a deliberate, methodical strategy to expand its footprint across Africa, economically, politically, and militarily with the ultimate goal of undermining the United States and projecting power into some of the most strategic regions of the world. Nowhere is that strategy more apparent or more dangerous than in the maritime domain.

China understands that control of maritime ports means control over global commerce and strategic leverage over the United States. Africa's coastlines sit at the crossroads of global arteries and Beijing intends to dominate them.

We have already seen what that looks like. Since 2017, China has operated a military base in Djibouti, mere miles down the road

from ours. Beijing is also actively negotiating military access agreements up and down the Horn of Africa. Their goal is clear—secure naval presence at the gateway to the Red Sea, which is one of the most critical shipping corridors in the world.

And as our adversaries test us with attacks on international shipping and even direct threats to our own facilities such as the Houthi threats to U.S. forces in Djibouti, failing to respond with strength sends one message, that America is not willing to defend its interests or its allies. That sentiment only encourages Beijing and every other hostile actor to keep pushing.

Today's hearing focuses specifically on maritime security in Africa and the implications for U.S. commercial diplomacy. The security of Africa's waters has a direct bearing on the security of the United States. The continent's Atlantic coast connects to our homeland through the same maritime routes that carry our energy supplies, commerce, and unfortunately transnational criminal flows. On the other side of the continent, the Red Sea and the Western Indian Ocean form the western flank of the Indo-Pacific, where China seeks to expand its naval reach. If we overlook Africa's maritime vulnerabilities, we leave open pathways that adversaries can exploit against us.

This issue is not theoretical. It addresses an acute, present, and real threat to global commerce and security.

China's influence in Africa's maritime ports also directly impacts American workers, our economic stability, and our national security. First, China's aggressive pursuit of a military port in West Africa would represent a major threat to U.S. security. A Chinese naval facility on the Atlantic would allow Beijing to operate warships, including submarines, opposite our East Coast. It would also fundamentally put American cities, shipping, and undersea infrastructure at risk.

Second, China's malign behavior on the seas already harms African nations and the United States. Illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing by Chinese vessels devastates local economies, fuels corruption, and drives instability. It also undermines legitimate U.S. commercial engagement, engagement that should be building prosperity and trust with our African partners, not ceding the field to the CCP.

Third, the maritime domain is increasingly a battleground for hybrid warfare, including piracy and criminal networks, human trafficking routes, narcotrafficking routes, sabotage, and interference with undersea cables, and coercive economic practices. China is exploiting all of these avenues, not just one, all of them.

The United States should modernize and adequately fund the tools required to counter the CCP's maritime expansion, defend freedom of navigation, and protect American commercial interests.

But let me be clear. We will block any attempt by the CCP to take advantage of our African partners or the United States. In previous hearings, I have emphasized the importance of the United States being the preferred partner for African nations. We offer transparency, economic growth, the rule of law, and respect for sovereignty, while China pursues exploitation across every domain. The CCP intends to displace the United States globally, and Africa

is a critical medium of that ambition. Maritime domain is one of their many campuses.

Thank you and I look forward to your testimonies. I now recognize Ranking Member Booker.

**STATEMENT OF HON. CORY A. BOOKER,
U.S. SENATOR FROM NEW JERSEY**

Senator BOOKER. I want to thank Senator Cruz for working together to hold this hearing. I appreciate him and his focus on these issues. I want to thank the witnesses for being here today. You all are in really important jobs and have taken time out to prepare for this hearing and to be here today. It is much appreciated for what I think is a vital conversation.

In previous subcommittee hearings, we have heard a lot about how the Trump administration is saying that they are prioritizing commercial diplomacy in Africa. As a result, this hearing is going to examine what the Administration is doing to secure Africa's maritime domain, which directly connects to U.S. economic, trade, and security interests.

Thirty-eight of Africa's 54 countries are either coastal or island States—38 of the 54. Sub-Saharan Africa has two major coastlines, one along the Atlantic Ocean, the other along the Indian Ocean. And so we need to take a look at Africa and its maritime domain as part of the transatlantic space and the Indo-Pacific and global security in and of itself.

And so this is a frustration I have when I hear the Administration talk about transatlantic or Indo-Pacific policy. I rarely hear conversations about Africa. The continent also includes coastlines along the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, which are critical to U.S. security interests and the global economy. In fact, one-third of the world's shipping passes through Africa's maritime checkpoints—one third—and 25 percent of global trade flows through the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, and to the Western Indian Ocean.

We cannot ignore the challenges present in Africa's coastal waters. Not only do these challenges rob the region of economic progress stability, food security, and sovereignty, they also affect U.S. shippers, U.S. businesses, and our security interests, on top of the increasing costs Americans pay for goods. The safety of our U.S. citizens abroad and competition with China and Russia and a host of other reasons means that we should be far more focused on the issues we will be discussing today.

And so, here are some of the challenges I would like to zone in on. Houthi attacks have forced global shipping companies to divert routes away from the Red Sea, adding 2 weeks and 6,000 nautical miles to a vessel's journey around South Africa. Insurance premiums for shipping have surged, raising the cost for goods for consumers here in the United States and across the globe. In addition, piracy has spiked again off the coast of Somalia and continues in the Gulf of Guinea. I would like to hear from you all about how the Department is working across agencies and with coastal African countries to increase the security of these shipping lanes.

Second, as my colleague has mentioned, China is a really big competitor trying to fill the vacuum that America seems to be creating through its retreat from the continent of Africa. China's first

foreign military base in Africa is in Djibouti, near a critical shipping chokepoint and only 4 miles away from the U.S. strategic base in Djibouti. PRC State-owned firms control or hold stakes in about 60 to 70 ports across the African continent, with suspected interests in making dual-use ports with potential military applications. This should be frightening or staggering to Americans who are concerned about our global interests.

The previous AFRICOM Commander has testified before Congress, stating that a PRC base on Africa's Atlantic coast would alter the whole calculus of geostrategic global campaign plans for U.S. homeland protection. And he later called for U.S. leadership to counter China's efforts in West Africa, which frankly are significant. And then on the other hand, Russia has been in negotiations, as we have seen across the news, with the Sudanese military government for a number of years to establish a naval base in Port Sudan, right on the Red Sea.

And so today, I would like to hear from you about what the Department is doing to counter China's naval-basing aspirations in Africa and how we are working to become a partner of choice to African countries looking to improve or establish port infrastructure.

Africa is also the continent from which the highest share of human trafficking flows originate. Coastal African countries are sources, transit points, and destinations for men, women, and children subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking. After the Trump administration's irresponsible decision to terminate a majority of U.S. foreign assistance programs, I would really like to hear what the State Department's plan is, what they are going to do to help countries stop and prevent this grotesque level of human trafficking.

Illegal fishing dramatically reduces the catch of local fisheries, diminishing sources of protein and livelihoods for regions. Indeed, a lot of the instability we are seeing in some West African nations has some solid roots to the overfishing done by many Chinese vessels in West African fisheries. Some estimates place annual losses to African coastal States due to illegal fishing at \$2.3 to \$3.3 billion. China maintains the largest distance water fishing fleet, with hundreds of vessels illegally fishing off the coast of West Africa, to devastating effects on the countries that are on that coast. I would like to hear from you how the Department is working to combat illegal fishing and support blue economies along the coast of Africa. This is vital not just to African interests but to security interests in the region and U.S. economic interests.

These cost-cutting issues do not fit neatly into any one bureau or office at the State Department, and they involve multiple U.S. departments and agencies, from State to DoD to the U.S. Coast Guard, and development agencies like the Millennium Challenge Corporation and the Development Finance Corporation. As a result, the U.S. must have interagency strategies and tools to address the challenges related to Africa's maritime security.

With a focus on commercial diplomacy at the State Department, I would have actually expected a plan, a strategy, a set of processes put forward to address these issues, these growing crises, these growing threats against the Administration's Stated goals. Instead

we see the growing challenges on the continent because of this Administration's withdrawal from its investments and strategic partnerships on the continent.

There is no strategy that I have seen. The Administration has terminated and defunded many of the bipartisan tools that my colleagues, including my former colleague, now the Secretary of State, have endorsed. For years now I have worked on this committee with partners that understand that this, the growing strength, the growing population, the growing importance of the African continent demands from us an effective strategy. It is very sad, and, in fact, tragic to see the Administration offering none, and yet pulling away from a continent that desperately needs American strength, and this unfortunately is creating a vacuum being filled by the Chinese and the Russians.

While the Trump administration now is failing, they are failing to nominate an Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, which is stunning. It allows U.S. ambassadorial positions across Africa to remain vacant. We have offered, as Democrats, to do everything we can to fast-track the process if they will nominate people for many of these positions. And then the reductions in force among State Department employees, the shutdowns of USAID, the terminating of a majority of U.S. foreign assistance to Africa, the drastic reduction of our tools, our collective expertise, and our presence, have made ground for China, Russia, and other malign actors to swoop in and undermine not just the stability of the continent today, but to undermine the stability in the future.

This hearing, I think, is vital and that is why I am appreciative of my colleague, Ted Cruz. The subcommittee is having the first hearing since Donald Trump actually has shown through his leadership vile and insulting language of entire countries in Africa. I remember when I traveled to Africa right after, in his first term, when he referred to many countries in Africa as shithole countries. I had heads of State, peers, and ambassadors show me such disgust and distress that the leader of the United States of America would refer to these countries in this manner.

But I want to take this opportunity now in Donald Trump's second term, where he continues that kind of rhetoric, to strongly condemn the President's hurtful, xenophobic, and frankly anti-American comments about Somalia, Somalis, and even Americans like Representative Omar. We know that Somali refugees and Somali Americans are truly people in this Nation that have provided such strength and value to who we are. I know Somali Americans, like every American, which are one of many ethnic groups that make the fabric of our Nation. They have shown such strength in their contributions to make our Nation stronger and better. It is absolutely unconscionable to me, unimaginable to me, that a President of the United States would use such vile, hurtful, demeaning, and degrading rhetoric about any group of Americans, and especially the consequences it has in our relations with those countries of origin.

This is an important hearing, but I tell you, my experience on this committee has been so affirming in the past, I am hoping that we cannot just talk about these issues, but join together to work to make sure the State Department actually has the kind of strate-

gies we need to advance American interests, American partnerships, and strengthen growth between the U.S. and nations in Africa.

And with that, Mr. Chairman, I am grateful.

Senator CRUZ. Thank you. I would now like to introduce our three witnesses for today.

Our first witness is Marco Sylvester, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Transportation Affairs. Marco, I would be remiss if I did not give a shout-out to your wife, Sara, who spent several years as my scheduling director, running my life. Please give Sara my best.

Senator BOOKER. Which one is—oh, Sara is not here. Is she here?

Senator CRUZ. No.

Senator BOOKER. Oh, you are here. Fantastic.

Senator CRUZ. I did not even—she was hiding behind you. OK, well, there you go. I will give the shout-out myself. Good to see you.

Senator BOOKER. That cannot be an easy job, to have been your scheduler.

Senator CRUZ. Sara, let me know afterwards if he does a good job or not. Just give me your critique.

Our second witness is Ms. Maggie Nardi, Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Office of Africa and the Middle East, and the Office of International Negotiations in the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement.

And our third witness is Dr. Ruth Perry, Acting Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary and Deputy Assistant Secretary for Ocean, Fisheries, and Polar Affairs in the Bureau of Oceans and International Environment and Scientific Affairs. She is also a fellow Texan and a graduate of Texas A&M—Gig 'Em. And I, for one, am predicting a national championship of A&M versus Texas Tech, and I am looking forward to wearing a Switzerland shirt while cheering them both on.

Ms. PERRY. It is too early.

Senator CRUZ. With that, I will recognize Mr. Sylvester for your opening statement.

STATEMENT OF MARCO M. SYLVESTER, DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR TRANSPORTATION AFFAIRS, DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON, DC

Mr. SYLVESTER. Thank you, Senator. Chairman Cruz, Ranking Member Booker, and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss maritime challenges in Africa today.

Africa's maritime domain is vital to global commerce, energy, and food security. Under Secretary Rubio's leadership, the State Department is committed to protecting U.S. interests by enhancing maritime domain awareness, supporting American economic interests, and countering malign influence in this critical region.

As both of you mentioned in your testimonies, our adversaries increasingly target strategic African ports, seeking military and commercial advantages. These nations promote State-owned and affiliated companies, including untrusted port technologies, allowing them access to sensitive information and the ability to disrupt foreign trade. Such influence undermines host nations' sovereignty

over their infrastructure and fosters corruption. For the United States, this creates economic and national security risks.

President Trump's unprecedented successes in rebalancing our trade relationships globally and Secretary Rubio's emphasis on advancing U.S. business abroad have opened new opportunities across Africa. Through diplomatic engagement and targeted programs, the Department advocates for transparent port governance and exposes predatory lending. These actions reduce our adversaries' influence in the transportation sector.

Our Economic Bureau and the Department's economic officers on the ground in Africa are identifying commercial opportunities and facilitating connections for U.S. firms while supporting fair trade. The Department's 2026 Port Prosperity Partnership will connect U.S. and African ports to share best practices, improve security, and foster innovation.

In the Red Sea and the surrounding sea lanes, Houthi attacks, enabled by Iranian support, have endangered innocent seafarers, disrupted trade, and threatened regional stability. President Trump, through the historic Gaza Peace Plan, is increasing shipping lane security to the benefit of American consumers and American security.

Mr. Chairman, the Trump administration is committed to growing trade with Africa. A stable, secure maritime sector is essential to this goal. We support regional cooperation and African-led solutions that uphold freedom of navigation, the rule of law, and global prosperity. By increasing our engagement and commercial diplomacy with African nations, we help secure vital maritime routes, foster American prosperity, and safeguard our national security.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Sylvester follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MARCO M. SYLVESTER

Chairman Cruz, Ranking Member Booker, distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss maritime challenges in Africa.

Africa's maritime domain is vital to global commerce, energy, and food security. Under Secretary Rubio's leadership, the State Department is committed to protecting U.S. interests by enhancing maritime domain awareness, supporting American economic interests, and countering malign influence in this critical region.

Strategic African ports are increasingly targeted by our adversaries seeking military and commercial advantages. These nations promote state-owned and affiliated companies, including untrusted port technologies, allowing them access to sensitive information and the ability to disrupt foreign trade. Such influence undermines host nations' sovereignty over their infrastructure and fosters corruption. For the United States, this creates economic and national security risks.

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Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

Senator CRUZ. Thank you.

Ms. Nardi, you are now recognized for your opening statement.

STATEMENT OF MAGGIE NARDI, DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY, BUREAU OF INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS AND LAW ENFORCEMENT AFFAIRS, DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON, DC

Ms. NARDI. Thank you, Chairman Cruz, Ranking Member Booker, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, I also thank you for this opportunity to address maritime security challenges in Africa.

The State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, or INL, confronts illicit maritime activity that threatens freedom of navigation and endangers U.S. interests. INL combats transnational criminal organizations, or TCOs, which exploit gaps in maritime law enforcement across Africa to smuggle drugs and illegally extracted natural resources. In the Western Indian Ocean and along the east coast, law enforcement data shows a 150 percent increase in methamphetamine seizures just in the past year, and that includes some seizures conducted with INL assistance.

In Southern and Eastern Africa, U.S. law enforcement is seeing evidence of Mexican cartels exploiting maritime routes and regulatory gaps to traffic synthetic drugs; and with host country counterparts, law enforcement has identified eight large-scale, cartel-linked methamphetamine labs.

The West, the Gulf of Guinea remains a hotspot for illicit activity. Foreign industrial fleets, including many linked to China, drive alarming levels of illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing. This deepens economic instability, leaving coastal populations vulnerable to recruitment by criminal and terrorist organizations.

Russia and China are more than willing to violate African sovereignty in pursuit of military and commercial footholds, although China is more engaged than Russia in the maritime space. China is active in nearly every African country, and established its first overseas People's Liberation Army, or PLA, base in Djibouti, as was mentioned.

In 2023, an INL project identified links between fishing vessels that were escorted by the PLA Naval Escort Task Force from that base with China's Maritime Belt and Road Initiative projects across West Africa. China is involved in over a quarter of all African ports, and we are aware that Chinese officials have discussed the possibility of a maritime facility with Gabon, and may be pursuing additional basing opportunities in the region. This activity creates corruption risks and reduces opportunities for U.S. trade and investment.

To address these threats, INL is improving maritime enforcement and port security, countering transnational crime, and

strengthening the rule of law to enable U.S. commercial activity. INL provides direct maritime law enforcement and port security equipment and training, working with other U.S. agencies to help countries confront activities that threaten shipping lanes and U.S. businesses, and provide revenue to TCOs and terrorists.

Our programs address complex crimes and support information-sharing and tracking and targeting technology, as well as effective prosecution. These efforts are paying dividends. Just last month, Mauritian law enforcement officials who are trained by INL intercepted 433 kilos of cocaine. Port security is a critical element of maritime security. An effective cargo screening and verification aides efforts to combat smuggling, and reduces vulnerability to exploitation by malign Chinese actors.

To counter Chinese interference with U.S. trade interests, INL works with the U.S. Coast Guard and Customs and Border Protection to improve port security and cybersecurity infrastructure in West Africa. In Gabon, INL is procuring maritime vessels and providing training to counter IUU fishing and other illicit maritime activity.

INL is also facilitating information-sharing between the Gulf of Guinea nations and Latin American partners to address the transcontinental trafficking by Western Hemisphere-based FTOs. A recent operation by INL-trained units that included work between Cabo Verde, Mauritania, Portugal, and Brazil resulted in an at-sea interdiction of approximately one ton of cocaine transiting the Gulf of Guinea.

With the committee's support, INL intends to continue strengthening maritime security and countering destructive criminal actors in support of U.S. trade and investment. Secure maritime routes in Africa are essential to reliable movement of U.S. commerce.

I want to thank you for your attention and your leadership on these threats to maritime security which impact the United States, and I welcome your questions. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Nardi follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MAGGIE NARDI

Chairman Cruz, Ranking Member Booker, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to address maritime security challenges in Africa and the Department of State's efforts to counter threats to U.S. interests and commercial diplomacy. Through robust partnerships with African governments and interagency coordination, the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) confronts illicit maritime activity, piracy, and trafficking networks that threaten freedom of navigation and endanger U.S. commercial interests.

Confronting the Surge of Illicit Maritime Activity

INL programs combat transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) and other illicit actors who exploit gaps in maritime law enforcement across Africa to smuggle a variety of illicit goods, including drugs and illegally extracted natural resources. In the Western Indian Ocean, networks originating in Southwest Asia—particularly Afghanistan and Iran—traffic heroin, methamphetamines, and other narcotics via dhows and other vessels, moving drugs from production areas through the Arabian Sea and along the East African coast. Recent law enforcement data reveal a 150 percent increase in methamphetamine seizures in the past year, including some conducted as a result of INL assistance, along traditional Southwest Asian trafficking routes. In addition, there have been eight cases of large scale Mexican cartel-linked methamphetamine laboratories operating in Southern and Eastern Africa, which had not been observed in the region prior to 2023. U.S. law enforcement is also see-

ing evidence of Mexican cartels exploiting maritime routes and regulatory gaps governing precursor chemicals to traffic synthetic drugs in the region.

On Africa's west coast, the Gulf of Guinea remains a hotspot for piracy, illegal fishing, and drug trafficking from the Caribbean and South America. INL is providing direct maritime law enforcement training, port security equipment and training, and building partnerships within the region, across the Atlantic, and with U.S. law enforcement agencies to help countries confront these activities that threaten vital shipping lanes and U.S. businesses, while also providing revenue to TCOs and terrorist actors in North Africa and the Sahel. Foreign industrial fleets, including many linked to China, exploit regional waters, driving alarming levels of illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing. This depletes fish stocks and worsens economic instability, leaving coastal populations vulnerable to recruitment by criminal and terrorist organizations.

Russia and China are more than willing to violate African sovereignty in the pursuit of military and commercial footholds along African coasts. China is active in nearly every African country, with at least 61 port projects, and its first overseas People's Liberation Army (PLA) base in Djibouti. In 2023, an INL project identified links between fishing vessels escorted by the PLA Naval Escort Task Force and a privately operated fishing base in Mauritania, supported by China's maritime Belt and Road Initiative. These vessels and their owners have created corruption risks at every level in various African countries, which reduces opportunities for U.S. trade investment.

U.S. Responses and Partnerships

INL programming addresses these maritime threats by improving maritime enforcement and port security in West Africa, countering transnational threats, and enabling U.S. trade and investment. IUU fishing is often linked to other crimes, making it imperative that our training programs include counternarcotics, identification of human trafficking and forced labor, information sharing and technology to track and target vessels for interdiction, as well as training on the "judicial finish" to help countries prosecute complex maritime crimes.

Port security is also a critical element of maritime security. Ensuring cargo that is transiting or off-loaded at ports is screened and verified aids our efforts to combat TCOs that are known to smuggle weapons, drugs, people, and other illicit goods via cargo containers in poorly secured ports. To counter malign Chinese interference with U.S. trade interests in West Africa and to protect Americans from online scams, INL is working with the U.S. Coast Guard and CBP to improve port security and cyber security infrastructure in West Africa.

In the Western Indian Ocean, INL brings together countries impacted by transnational criminal activity to share information and collaboratively respond to violations of sovereignty. We work closely with partners to strengthen their abilities to track, board, and apprehend those engaged in illegal activities to ensure consistent prosecution and incarceration of criminals that threaten U.S. national security. And our efforts are paying dividends—just last month, Mauritian law enforcement officers, trained by INL on maritime search and seizure techniques, intercepted 433 kilos of cocaine with an estimated street value of over \$70 million.

Strengthening Targeted U.S. Support for African Partners

INL is strengthening targeted programming to secure vulnerable ports and maritime areas by working with U.S. law enforcement partners to train West African maritime law enforcement and judicial officials to combat maritime crime and piracy that threatens U.S. security and commercial interests. INL is also facilitating information sharing between countries on the Gulf of Guinea and Latin American partners to address transcontinental trafficking by Western Hemisphere-based FTOs. A recent maritime enforcement operation by INL trained units that included work between Cabo Verde, Mauritania, Portugal, and Brazil resulted in an at-sea interdiction of an estimated one ton of cocaine transiting the Gulf of Guinea.

We are also supporting customs enforcement in major African ports to increase interdictions of illicit goods often exploited by malign Chinese actors. In Gabon, INL is in the process of procuring Defender-class maritime vessels and training to counter IUU fishing, particularly activities linked to China. INL also supports customs work at Gabon's Port of Libreville-Owendo by establishing an inter-agency Port Control Unit to combat transnational crime at the seaport. With INL support to professionalize the Kenyan Coast Guard, Kenya conducted 20 joint operations with neighboring countries in a six-month period earlier this year, resulting in interdictions of drugs and disruptions to human trafficking networks.

In addition, INL supports a range of initiatives to strengthen maritime security in the Western Indian Ocean, including technical assistance and equipment provi-

sion to improve intelligence-driven operations and legal frameworks for prosecuting maritime crimes. In 2026, INL is evaluating additional opportunities in East and Southern Africa to strengthen oversight and management of maritime ports, particularly ports experiencing increased Chinese maritime interference.

Conclusion

In conclusion, with this committee's support, INL intends to continue working with our regional partners to strengthen maritime and port security as well as counter destructive criminal actors in support of U.S. trade and investment. Secure maritime routes in Africa are essential to ensure reliable movement of U.S. commerce, especially energy and critical minerals. When maritime governance is weak, adversaries exploit these gaps and U.S. supply chains are threatened.

Thank you for your attention and leadership on these threats to maritime security which impact the United States. I welcome your questions.

Senator CRUZ. Thank you.

Dr. Perry, you are recognized for your opening statement.

STATEMENT OF RUTH L. PERRY, ACTING PRINCIPAL DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY, BUREAU OF OCEANS AND INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL AND SCIENTIFIC AFFAIRS, DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON, DC

Ms. PERRY. Thank you. Chairman Cruz, Ranking Member Booker, Senator Shaheen, and the distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today about the impact of maritime challenges in Africa on the U.S. fishing industry and how the Department of State will take action to protect the livelihoods of our fishermen.

As a proud Texan and longtime steward of the Gulf of America, I know firsthand the threat illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing poses to our economy, environment, and national security. The Gulf is America's working coast, vital to food systems and energy infrastructure. Yet foreign vessels, like those from Mexico, deplete iconic species like Red Snapper and undermine fishing industry efforts to maintain sustainable fisheries. This is not just an environmental issue. It is about sovereignty and economic security.

Under the leadership of State's Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs, we convened an emergency interagency task force with Department of Justice, NOAA, and the Coast Guard. For the first time, individuals caught illegally fishing are being prosecuted under the Lacey Act. As Deputy Assistant Secretary of OES, I am committed to building this momentum. The stakes are too high, and we must act decisively act to protect our fish, our fishermen, and America's working coast.

IUU fishing off Africa's coast is not just a local problem. It threatens U.S. fishermen, our industry, and our national security. U.S. commercial and recreational fishing generate nearly half a trillion dollars annually and supports 2.5 million jobs. We have built the world's most respected fisheries management system—science based, strongly enforced, and proven to ensure long-term species health. But our companies face unfair competition from nations that ignore catch limits, food safety, and labor laws, all practices driving prices artificially low. The State Department is committed to confronting this challenge head on, protecting American jobs, and defending the integrity of our seafood supply.

Over the years, U.S. market share for American seafood producers has steadily fallen, and more than 80 percent of the seafood consumed in the United States is imported. Data suggest imports

have fallen this year, but fish and fish products coming into the U.S. from Africa are still valued in the hundreds of millions of dollars.

IUU fishing in African waters not only distorts global markets and creates unfair competition for U.S. seafood producers, it directly undermines the livelihoods of American commercial and recreational fishermen. Highly migratory species of tuna and billfish range across the Atlantic Ocean; illegal and unsustainable harvests off Africa can mean fewer of these keystone fish return to our waters. That damage is just part of what some sources say is roughly \$10 billion in annual losses Africa suffers from IUU fishing, driven by both domestic fleets and distant-water fleets, primarily from China. But the consequences go far beyond economics. This illegal activity is increasingly tied to transnational crime, including human trafficking, drug smuggling, and maritime insecurity, posing a direct threat to regional stability and ultimately American security.

Advancing and defending the U.S. fishing industry is an administration priority. President Trump's April Executive Order on Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness calls for a whole-of-government approach to promote the productive harvest of our seafood resources, combat IUU fishing, and protect our seafood markets from unfair trade practices.

The Department of State works with the Department of Commerce and other agencies to ensure the American fishing industry competes on a level playing field. Together, we push the other members of regional fisheries management organizations to adopt binding fishing rules for shared stocks that are in line with our high domestic standards, based on the best available science and backed by effective fisheries monitoring and control. Where foreign nations break the rules or refuse to step up, the State Department works with our interagency partners to ban their vessels from U.S. ports and close our markets to their products.

A unified interagency response is not just important, it is essential. Combating IUU fishing and its associated criminal networks requires effectively coordinated and efficiently deployed U.S. capabilities. This is why the State Department, NOAA, and the Coast Guard lead a whole-of-government effort to combat IUU fishing under the Maritime Security and Fisheries Enforcement Act, or the Maritime SAFE Act, since 2019. To protect U.S. fishermen and our markets, we have provided technology, training, and equipment; participated in enforcement actions; and created frameworks for lasting regional cooperation throughout Africa. For example, Ghana now uses the American-made SmartMast system to increase its maritime domain awareness, setting the stage for increased cooperation with its neighbors. These achievements are something to be proud of. But the danger to the American fishing industry from IUU fishing in African waters persists.

Progress is moving too slowly. To protect our fishing industry, we must ensure American producers stay competitive worldwide and that our economy is strengthened and the industry is preserved for the next generations. That means securing access to healthy fish stocks and guarding against threats from bad actors and irresponsible nations. The Department of State is building a refined ap-

proach that is faster, more targeted, and more agile to combat the dynamic threat posed to American industry by illegal, unsustainable, and unfair fishing practices in Africa.

The State Department is closing the gap between America's high standards and the exploitative practices of fleets in African waters. The U.S. fishing industry sets the global benchmark for sustainability, with thriving stocks to prove it. But protecting this success requires coordinated action—diplomatic, enforcement, and scientific. We will punish bad actors, hold partners accountable, put American fishermen first, and defend our waters, our economy, and our way of life.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you all today.
[The prepared statement of Ms. Perry follows:]

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Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you all today.

Senator CRUZ. Thank you to each of the witnesses. As I mentioned in my opening statement, China is actively exploiting maritime access across Africa to undermine U.S. interests and to position itself as the dominant power in the region. Beijing is securing port access, building dual-use infrastructure, expanding illegal fishing fleets, and leveraging debt to gain long-term strategic footholds. The result is a slow but deliberate remaking of maritime power in China's favor.

This first question is to all three of the witnesses. Walk us through specifically how the Chinese are exploiting African maritime access and what would Chinese dominance of key chokepoints mean for global shipping, energy access, trade flow, and the security of allies who rely on those routes? Mr. Sylvester, we will start with you.

Mr. SYLVESTER. Thank you, Senator, for the question, and I think it is extremely important to look at the African continent but also Chinese influence in maritime globally. So actually I would start upstream of what you had mentioned and look at the maritime space as a whole. For example, China controls 95 percent of the container manufacturing for cargo globally. They control 60 percent of the shipbuilding globally. They have one of the largest shipping lines in the world as a State-owned enterprise.

So in order to counter this, of course, as you know, President Trump signed the Restoring America's Maritime Dominance Executive Order in April. That prescribed different steps for reindustrializing and rebuilding of American shipbuilding capacity. So I

would start there, because with those supply chain advantages China cannot only direct where ships go, but also refuse to actually send ships to American-aligned ports, not just encourage investment in Chinese-aligned ports.

The second thing I would mention here is the predatory lending schemes that we have seen across the continent. China, many times, will undercut U.S. bids with upfront cash that have many strings attached and really exploit the host countries to ensure permanent control over those strategic locations.

The third thing I would say is, to the dual use point, that they have shown the willingness to militarize these commercial investments, either nearby or at the ports themselves.

Senator CRUZ. Ms. Nardi?

Ms. NARDI. Thank you, Senator, for that question. I would start with coastal West Africa, where we definitely see a very intense Chinese effort to build ports, port facilities, training facilities, or different sort of, I would say, surveillance operations. When we saw that happening in Gabon we decided to try to reach out to the government, to work with them to make the United States the partner of choice, and to talk to them about what we could do for them, and also their own responsibilities, how we could make them stronger and more self-sufficient. And as a result of that, we are working on a million-dollar port security program and giving \$4 million worth of fast boats for them to increase patrolling of the waters around that area.

In Côte d'Ivoire, where we have seen that there is a lot of unknown vessels that are flagged Ivorian, we are working them to try to strengthen their flag recognition and limitations to prevent Chinese or others from using their flags for illegal vessels. We are looking at the opportunity to use satellite information to do better tracking of unknown or suspicious vessels that are out in that region.

And we are doing a lot of training regionally, as well, through Interpol, UNODC, and others to get those countries to work together to share information and also to arrest and prosecute those who are related to Chinese illegal fishing.

But to your point, there are already—and I think you mentioned this earlier on—the impacts of IUUF certainly are being seen, where fishermen do not have, again, ability to make a livelihood, and so they turn to narcotrafficking. They will go out into the waters to pick up dead drops and move drugs that will go on to Europe, either with the help of Balkan networks, Nigerians, or others. Increased immigration, as well. Emigration from Senegal to the United States has increased significantly over the last several years. We believe part of that is because of the impact to livelihoods there.

So there are a lot of immediate impacts already. The longer-term impact, as my colleague noted, looking at the bigger picture we are seeing out in the Pacific, where China is offering to serve as the Navy for islands that do not have their own Navy or their own Coast Guard, and, “We’ll do it for you. You don’t need to worry about that.” So that is something that we are also watching, and coastal West Africa, as a potential threat.

Senator CRUZ. Dr. Perry?

Ms. PERRY. Thank you for the question. As you heard from my colleagues covered much of the land and port side of this and how it starts to disrupt maritime flows. Let me reinforce the impact that you are talking about through your question, Senator Cruz.

China's fleets have tens of thousands of vessels in Africa and has \$3.8 billion in total annual catch. This kind of scale, combined with State subsidies and weak enforcement, allows China to not only exploit those fisheries' resources at all levels of the ecosystem and create ecocide through their fishing practices but also takes away hundreds of thousands of artisanal fisheries jobs from West Africa and other African nations.

Chinese trawlers are backed by State subsidies, and they dominate and outcompete the fishers, as I have mentioned. Weak regulations and limited enforcement allow for illegal practices, such as fishing in prohibited zones and using destructive gear. These socioeconomic impacts are severe, and Chinese industrial fishing fleets have contributed to significant overfishing and habitat destruction in West African waters.

So what are we doing to combat that? I mentioned the SAFE Act. I am the newest co-chair, alongside my NOAA and U.S. Coast Guard colleagues, which brings together 21 Federal agencies to develop and implement strategies for priority regions. IUU fishing, including Africa but also the Pacific, is a priority for both the Secretary and the Deputy Secretary at the Department of State, and now we are combining a statewide approach to close the gap that China has created.

But there are also good practices. You heard that this is a combination of monitoring, surveillance, and enforcement. For example, our work with Ghana has made significant progress in many of these areas. So I will not recapture the monitoring and surveillance that you heard, but I will just add that we have also been able to work with partners through our diplomacy to improve legal structures so that when we monitor and detect illegal fishing, and particularly Chinese interests, that these countries like Ghana can actually enforce and respond and take the threat away.

So in addition to the increased technology, increased maritime domain awareness, we are also working on legal structures and training so that the enforcement can actually prove results. Thank you.

Senator CRUZ. Thank you. Ranking Member Booker.

Senator BOOKER. I am going to defer to my Chairwoman.

Senator CRUZ. Ranking Member Shaheen.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you very much, Senator Booker and Chairman Cruz.

Before I get to the questions today I would like to address two issues that apply to Africa and that are important to this subcommittee. First, on yesterday's violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo. News reports indicate that Rwanda-backed M23 rebels seized a key town in the east. This is a major escalation, and it comes just days after President Trump hosted the Rwandan and Congolese Presidents to tout a plan for peace and prosperity.

Videos show civilians fleeing gunfire, and there are reports of refugees streaming over the border into Burundi. This is exactly what the agreement was meant to prevent. It would appear that the

Rwandan government gave President Trump promises that the government was not willing to deliver on. Senator Risch and I put out a statement on that peace signing, and what we said in our statement was that the U.S. would act if the parties do not uphold their commitments. I look forward to working with members of this subcommittee to take those necessary steps and encourage the Administration to also uphold the commitments that were made.

Second, I want to reiterate the importance of U.S. support for the Somali government, the Somali people, and the Somali American community. Senator Booker addressed the comments that the President made earlier in his comments. But at a moment when cooperation with Somalia is essential to counter piracy and strengthen security off its coast, it is important to reaffirm that partnership. Our policy should be grounded in facts and in the strength of our alliances, not in comments that undercut communities who are critical to that work.

Mr. Sylvester, thank you, and thank you to all of our witnesses for being here. In November, Senator Barrasso and I introduced bipartisan legislation to ensure a whole-of-government strategy on subsea cables for the Department of State, to ensure that you have the requisite expertise you need to lead international coordination on the subject.

Now, you may know, Mr. Sylvester, that New Hampshire is home to SubCom. It is one of the world's biggest developers of undersea cables. So can you talk a little bit about the role that the State Department can play in supporting American companies like subcom as they work to compete against the PRC firms and win bids to lay cables across the world, and also to help protect those cables.

Mr. SYLVESTER. Absolutely, Senator. Thank you for the question. I have actually met with subcom personally and was extremely impressed with the breadth of what they do and really the history behind the company, so I appreciate that shoutout for them.

So, what we are doing on the topic of subsea cables is twofold. No. 1, trying to ensure that countries go with trusted vendors for subsea cables rather than the Chinese alternatives. So a couple of programs that went specifically to that. So in the East Asia Pacific Bureau there is a program called the CABLES Program. When that program started there was an 18 percent market share for what is now called HMN Tech in the region, in EAP. After a few years, that market share is now down to 7 percent. That program really was just an educational program about the data security risks of going with untrusted subsea cable vendors, and we already saw tremendous results, to the point where the Cyberspace and Digital Policy Bureau is now taking that program global, a program called ProCON. So that is one thing, is encouraging that education.

The second thing is continuing diplomacy to encourage partners to adopt the New York Principles. So this was an agreement on not just education but also building out a resilient system. While some cuts or some damage to subsea cables may be inevitable because of ships sinking or accidental anchor drags, this program, or these principles, encourage countries to sign on to building a resilient

system, so there are not those chokepoints where one cut can be catastrophic to the global and digital economy.

So those would be two examples. I will just say, as far as the risks, where we have seen Chinese dominance in the South China Sea, there have been incidents where there is interference with the maintenance and repair of subsea cables. And we are obviously concerned that if that influence were to spread to a place like Africa or the Gulf of Guinea, where there are a lot of connections to land, that similar incidents could occur. So certainly it is a top priority for the Department, Senator.

Senator SHAHEEN. Well, thank you. I applaud the Government of Finland for the work that they have done to address Russian deliberately cutting of North Sea cables. I think we need to encourage more countries to take that action. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator CRUZ. Thank you.

Ranking Member Booker.

Senator BOOKER. Can I just go back to—it is an area that I do not know as much about as my colleague. But I am familiar with some of the undersea cable activity. For example, from Tanzania to Zanzibar there was an extraordinary project, an infrastructure investment, that helped deal with rolling blackouts and a lot of other programs. Really critical infrastructure being built.

My concern is that I know that was an MCC project, and with our pulling back of resources it not only seems to be hurting U.S. companies but also the kind of alliances that make our infrastructure investments in Africa competitive with all that China seems to be offering.

Do you have a perspective on the value of what has been a bipartisan program in MCC and the value it plays in things like the laying of these cables and the critical infrastructure that China is rushing into Africa to provide?

Mr. SYLVESTER. Sure. Thank you, Senator, again for the question on this very important topic. The MCC is still moving forward with compacts—I understand there was a reexamination of a number of them—but has certainly not ruled out that the MCC would form new compacts going forward.

What I would say on investment with subsea cables specifically, 70 percent of the investment toward subsea cable infrastructure is by U.S. technology, what they call hyperscaler companies, Google and Meta, that have invested billions of dollars in Africa but across the world in the buildout of subsea cables. That, still today, is the vast majority of investment, even to those investments that might not seem economical now.

Now, what our Cyberspace and Digital Policy Bureau has done is invested in some of those connections from kind of the outer coast actually to make those landings. So those are things that are still going on, still certainly a priority. But if you would like more information on that—

Senator BOOKER. No, I appreciate your expertise. Trust me. It is helpful for me, and I am expanding my knowledge on this issue, in particular. But just to go back to what you said, so clearly the MCC has an impactful role. It is a program that has been supported in a bipartisan manner, the value of it. I know you said

there have been no, necessarily, new compacts or retreating from that, but could you testify here to the value of the program.

Mr. SYLVESTER. Senator, my understanding is that compacts are still moving forward.

Senator BOOKER. No, no, but the compacts themselves are valuable, yes, in strategic relations, infrastructure, American companies. They are valuable, correct?

Mr. SYLVESTER. I would say that the MCC itself, when they move forward with projects, that the Administration, Secretary Rubio, determine are

[inaudible].

Senator BOOKER. Did Ted cut your mic?

Mr. SYLVESTER. No. I think maybe I ran out of time. But yes, I would say that the projects that the MCC pursues, new projects and compacts that are preserved, yes, I think that they are preserved because they have value. I am not sure on the specific project that you are talking about.

Senator BOOKER. Understood. Let me continue. Again, this is not my area of expertise, but I was surprised, on one of my visits recently to West Africa, how both American companies like Google, as well as people that were trying to partner in some of the West African countries, said that the American desire was there, the intention was there, but there was corruption, specifically in those countries. And a lot of the people in the State Department were saying to me, "We are doing a lot of really good work here helping these nations battle corruption, to make it a better environment."

But some of those programs that help with democracy seem to have been pulled back—not seem to have been, have been pulled back. And I guess if you can comment to me, the need, in many ways, where U.S. business interests meet the State Department's work on anticorruption efforts, especially in some of the West African countries where there are great business opportunities, but corruption undermines things like laying of these cables that support great American companies.

Mr. SYLVESTER. Sure. Thank you, Senator, for that question. I think a lot of that work on market reforms and structuring some of those bids and those concessions go through the Department of Commerce, their Commercial Advocacy Program, the CLDP.

Senator BOOKER. I know a lot of the sources of them, but the resources are being cut back. Correct?

Mr. SYLVESTER. So, Senator, on foreign aid broadly or additional resources toward Africa, I think fundamentally what the Administration has done is really rethought how to make sure American tax dollars go as far as they can and how they are well spent. So for example, Secretary Rubio signing with the Kenyan President of the \$1.6 billion health aid package, I think during those remarks he said rather than enriching NGO's in Northern Virginia, the intention now is to ensure that those governments can scale up their own capacity.

Senator BOOKER. No, I appreciate that. I recognize that. Let me, with the seconds I have left, Ms. Nardi, in your written testimony you mentioned that INL is providing direct maritime law enforcement training and building partnerships in the region. Even when I was a mayor, the Federal Government, we put Newark police offi-

cers with lots of Federal agents. It was just a great partnership, mentoring, and I would love to see that on the international level. It is a force multiplier in many ways, and I am grateful that this is a tradition in our country.

But I am concerned about the cuts here, as well. The Trump administration wants to cut funding, according to their budget, for programs like this by 80 to 90 percent. For example, the Fiscal Year 2026 budget included drastic cuts to INL program funding, proposing a cut of \$1.16 billion to the International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement Program's account, leaving only \$125 million remaining. Congress rejected this proposal in the current CR, but I am concerned about your ability, the agency's ability, to continue these mentoring programs that are doing such vital work, as you have testified to.

Will dramatic cuts of 80, 90 percent really undermine our effectiveness in this kind of interdiction, and work in general, but also the mentoring that gives that force a multiplier effect?

Ms. NARDI. Thank you, Senator, for the question and also for your support for this kind of programming, and we are already seeing very good results with it, particularly in the counternarcotics area, so thank you for that.

The approach that we have in Africa is regional, for the most part, because if China or a TCO finds a vulnerability in one country they will go there. But if those countries are shored up, then they just move on to the next one and the next one. Part of the problem that we have seen is the countries, one, within the country itself are stove-piped and do not talk to each other, but they do not talk to their neighboring countries as well.

So, the majority of our programs are regional in nature. On West Africa we have WARSI, the West Africa Regional Security Initiative, and on the east, EATOC, which is East Africa Transnational Organized Crime. I say this because that includes 12 different countries that go all the way down the coast, focusing on maritime security. And what we did was create, with these countries, two Centers of Excellence, one in Djibouti and one in the Seychelles, to do training on vessel boarding and on investigations and on exchange of information.

We have also gotten these countries to work together with a Regional Maritime Intel Fusion Center that is in Madagascar, here again, so that they exchange information. If a ship is coming down that looks like it is sort of suspicious but it is in somebody else's waters, you can let them know that it is coming and hopefully they take action.

The fact that we do these things regionally means we are not investing a lot of money in each of these places.

Senator BOOKER. I agree. I am way over time, and I am treading on the indulgences of my friend. But I will just say that American leadership, the leadership of the American Coast Guard and military—and I have been on the continent and I have seen the greatness of our country in practice, and you are describing that to us. I am just worried about its ability to sustain those levels or, in fact, increase them as the challenges grow greater. And again, this body has, in a bipartisan fashion, supported the resources. I would hate to see them cut in the way that the proposed budget is. The con-

sequences of that, for not just the regional security you are describing but for American interests would be dramatic. So thank you, and thank you for your indulgence, sir.

Senator CRUZ. Thank you. I am going to do a couple more questions, and then we will give Senator Booker an opportunity if he has any additional questions, as well.

Ms. Nardi, Somaliland is a critical U.S. maritime security partner in Africa. It sits along the Gulf of Aden near one of the world's busiest shipping corridors, and its forces actively contribute to counterterrorism and anti-piracy missions. Somaliland stands with our allies, including Taiwan and Israel, and aligns with U.S. interests in a region where China is aggressively expanding. Somaliland has offered the United States a military basing agreement and a critical minerals partnership. They are willing to work with us to counter China's malign influence and terrorist networks. This is the kind of partner we should be encouraging and one that will shape how we confront maritime security challenges across the continent.

Earlier this year, I sent a letter to President Trump, urging formal recognition of Somaliland. Unsurprisingly, the Chinese Communist Party immediately condemned that letter, which only underscores how strategically important Somaliland is to U.S. national security.

What tools and partnerships could the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement employ to help the United States deepen cooperation with Somaliland, to advance our common maritime security and law enforcement interests, especially against threats facing the Horn of Africa?

Ms. NARDI. Thank you, Senator, for that question. INL does not currently have any active programming in Somaliland, and our focus in the Horn of Africa is, in general, maritime security. I mentioned the Center of Excellence that we are working with Djibouti to establish, which will cover that region and then a little bit further south. We have worked with Somalia in the past and Djibouti on maritime vessel boarding and investigations, but those programs are coming to an end.

We certainly can review capabilities. We would begin any program with an assessment of needs. And we would work in close cooperation with the Africa Bureau and the State Department to determine their priorities for Somaliland. Thank you.

Senator CRUZ. Thank you. Mr. Sylvester, Senator Booked asked about undersea cables. Undersea cables are the arteries of the modern global economy, Africa's link to the world through 77 cable networks, that power its digital markets, support millions of jobs, and drive trade and innovation. But these cables are exposed to vulnerability. Just last year, cable cuts left parts of Nigeria offline, at a cost of nearly \$600 million in just 4 days. Repairs run into the millions, and outages ripple far beyond borders. Even worse, there are less than 100 cable repair ships across the world, of which only 3 of those service Africa, and only 1 is homeported in Africa.

Our adversaries understand that if you can control or disrupt digital infrastructure you can hold economies hostage. That is why maritime security is not just about protecting freedom of navigation and open commerce, but also about protecting the cables be-

neath the sea floor that nations depend on. Strong, secure, and open digital links mean stronger trade ties, resilient supply chains, and a continent less vulnerable to Beijing's chokehold.

Mr. Sylvester, what roles should U.S. maritime cooperation play in helping African nations diversify cable routes, protect high-risk, shallow water zones, and improve rapid response capabilities, especially considering that only one cable repair ship is homeported on the entire African coast?

Mr. SYLVESTER. Thank you, Senator, for that question, and again for highlighting this important issue. I would go back to the importance of building a resilient undersea cable system globally, which includes, of course, around the continent of Africa. So when we see these cable cuts: For example, there was an incident in the Red Sea following a Houthi attack, where 25 percent of the trans-continental data traffic was stalled, so in addition to the examples that you mentioned. So the resilience really is key there.

The second is we do have a leading company here in the United States, and we, as the State Department, are focused on promoting those U.S. companies as viable and trusted vendors across Africa. So while there are a limited number of these ships, the U.S. does have a good alternative to offer in the commercial space.

And the third is again educating the host countries that either have landings or want to put the investment in to have those cable landings. So on that front, we need to ensure that they know the data security risks and the malign influence that they would be exposed to if there were to go with an untrusted vendor.

Senator CRUZ. Thank you.

Senator Van Hollen.

Senator BOOKER. And I am going to ask the Senator to indulge me. I have to run. If you could take over checking the great Senator from Texas to make sure he does not talk about me or Stanford football when I leave.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. I will do that, Senator.

Senator BOOKER. Thank you very much.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Do they have a football team?

Senator BOOKER. Let the record show that I have asked the Senate leadership to Rule 19 you for that personal insult.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thank all of you for your testimony. I do want to pick up on a point I heard the ranking member make earlier, and I think some of my colleagues, with respect to President Trump's despicable statements about the Somali community here in the United States. And it is just the latest attack on a minority community in our country.

You know, if you look at the U.S. Senate, above the dais it says "E pluribus unum," out of many, one. And what Donald Trump is doing is just the opposite. And it is despicable here at home, and he has also maligned the countries of origin of so many of our communities here in the United States. So I have to say, as we talk about Africa, it is difficult to do so without noting our extreme disappointment in the President of the United States.

I want to talk about a particular country in Africa the President continues to malign, and that is South Africa. Mr. Sylvester, South Africa is one of the African continent's biggest economies, right? I think it is in the top three. Is that right?

Mr. SYLVESTER. Yes, sir.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. And it does play an important role in maritime security in the southern Africa region. Is that right?

Mr. SYLVESTER. Yes.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. I mean, it, of course, sits astride the Cape Sea route, and my understanding is it also plays an important role in policing and anti-piracy efforts in the Mozambique Channel. Is that right?

Mr. SYLVESTER. I would defer to my colleague on the law enforcement side, but my understanding is that it is an important maritime nation, in general.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Right. So an important country in Africa, both from an economic point of view, from a political point of view, from a maritime security point of view. And yet the Trump administration has decided to target South Africa. We know that despite the fact that it is a G-20 member, the President says they cannot come to the G-20 meeting in the United States. We know the United States decided not to go to South Africa for the G-20 meeting that was hosted by South Africa. We have heard the President make up this completely false accusation that South Africa is engaged in a genocide. And, of course, when it comes to our immigration policies, our refugee policies, the Administration has put a worldwide cap of about 7,500 on it overall, and the great majority would be white South Afrikaners.

So I ask you, Mr. Sylvester, what is South Africa doing to warrant these kinds of unfounded attacks?

Mr. SYLVESTER. So, Senator, my understanding of the scope of the hearing is on maritime security. I am not sure I am equipped to address the question as you have asked it. What I would say with respect to South Africa is that President Trump has shown willingness to work with any country to advance American interests, and our embassies on the ground are still pursuing commercial opportunities for U.S. companies across the continent.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Well, it does not sound to me like the President is really interested in engaging South Africa, even to advance our own interests. If that were the case, he would not set about attacking them without reason. You know, I am asking you because you are one of the political appointees at the State Department, and all we have seen is this series of attacks on South Africa. And, you know, the South African Government has options. I mean, they can partner with others around the world. Obviously, they have relationships with Russia, they have relationships with China, they are part of BRIC. But why in the world would we gratuitously attack them, based on what appears to be this trumped-up allegation that they are engaged in a genocide against white South Africans. That is not true, is it, that they are engaged in a genocide?

Mr. SYLVESTER. So, Senator, I am not familiar with the issue that you are raising. I have not been tracking that closely. Again, while I am a political appointee at the State Department I cover transportation issues, so aviation and maritime. I would be happy to address any questions you have on those issues in particular.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. No, I appreciate that. I just think, and I think others here recognize that when you are dealing with a coun-

try like South Africa, the third-biggest economy on the continent, where we do have shared interests, it does not really help our cause to advance those interests if we are gratuitously attacking this particular country. And it just is a mystery to me how the President sort of got trapped in this story that he keeps telling himself about South Africa. I hope, although realistically it may not be a realistic hope, that the Administration will change course and seek cooperation in areas of mutual interest.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator CRUZ. Thank you. I want to thank all the witnesses for their important testimony today. Senators will have until the close of business on Thursday, December 11th, to submit questions for the record.

This concludes today's hearing. The committee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 3:45 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

Additional Material Submitted for the Record

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO MARCO M. SYLVESTER BY SENATOR JEANNE SHAHEEN

Question. How are we planning to utilize U.S. investment tools like USTDA, MCC and DFC to create port investment opportunities for U.S. companies and counter China's investments in African ports?

Answer. The State Department recognizes that strategic investments in African ports are vital for U.S. commercial interests and national security. We are leveraging targeted commercial diplomacy, interagency coordination, and the resources available from DFC, EXIM, USTDA, and MCC to identify and de-risk commercial opportunities for U.S. companies, support high-standard, transparent, and resilient infrastructure projects aligned with U.S. interests, and counter the influence of non-market actors.

The DFC is backing the Lobito Corridor with a \$553 million loan for rail restoration and expansion in Angola and a letter of interest for an up to \$1 billion loan for rail rehabilitation and operation in the Democratic Republic of Congo. This project will facilitate efficient critical mineral transport, reduce non-market actors' dominance of African supply chains, and open U.S. commercial opportunities. MCC is pursuing compact development in Liberia with a prospective focus on energy or transport to strengthen mineral extraction infrastructure, and USTDA is planning reverse trade missions to connect African port authorities and government officials with U.S. providers of secure, modern, and efficient port solutions.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO MARGARET H. NARDI BY SENATOR JEANNE SHAHEEN

Question. How many people have been prosecuted, and from where, under since the start of the Trump Administration in January 2025?

Answer. The Department of Justice (DOJ) is the appropriate agency to address questions related to U.S. prosecutions, and as such, I would refer you to DOJ. To the extent that this question is aimed at prosecutions by our foreign partners of maritime crimes in Africa, INL does not maintain records of domestic court activity across the continent, but our general understanding is that, while facing significant capacity constraints, our partners take these crimes seriously and such cases often take several years to build, try, and arrive at decisions.

Question. Can you detail the importance of law enforcement mentorship and good governance programs in strengthening African countries' ability to secure their territorial waters?

Answer. Law enforcement mentorship and programs that strengthen the ability of African countries to secure their territorial waters and maintain sovereignty over precious resources advance the 2025 National Security Strategy goal to harness Africa's abundant natural resources, develop its latent economic potential, and foster

mutually beneficial trade relationships between capable, reliable states and the United States. Mentorship provides practical expertise to respond to threats such as piracy and trafficking. Good governance builds public trust and ensures effective, legitimate maritime security operations.

Question. Have any international U.S. law enforcement mentorship programs with African countries implemented by your bureau been terminated in the recent Foreign Assistance Review?

Answer. The Department conducted a thorough assessment of its foreign assistance programs to focus resources on initiatives that directly support U.S. national security objectives and keep America safe. INL continues to support mentorship and other programs with African partners to reduce illicit narcotics trafficking, counter IUUF and maritime crime, improve maritime and port security, and counter cybercrime.

Question. Can you provide this committee with a detailed list of active and terminated programs from your bureau pertaining to the Africa region?

Answer. The Department is focusing resources on initiatives that directly support U.S. national security objectives and keep America safe while prioritizing funding for the most effective programs. INL obligated \$41.4 million in FY 2024 funding for Africa, which will support African law enforcement to partner with U.S. law enforcement to investigate and prosecute transnational criminal organizations and networks, counter illicit trafficking, including of synthetic drugs and precursor chemicals, strengthen border and port security, and reduce cybercrime that targets Americans.

Question. With the recent coup in Guinea-Bissau, what is INL's assessment of the impact this will have on the flow of narcotics into Guinea-Bissau and transmitted throughout West Africa?

Answer. The State Department is closely following developments in Guinea-Bissau and continuing to monitor the situation on the ground. Political instability undermines law enforcement and governance, making it easier for traffickers to move drugs, especially cocaine, through Guinea-Bissau, as a transit point for narcotics in West Africa. We will work with our colleagues in the Bureau of African Affairs and U.S. law enforcement partners to gauge and minimize any impact on bilateral and regional cooperation to counter drug trafficking.

Question. Liberia and Sierra Leone are currently experiencing an inflow of synthetic drugs that are impacting the youth population in both countries. Where does INL assess these synthetic drugs are coming from, and how is the bureau working to address this issue?

Answer. Synthetic drugs like kush and tramadol are seriously affecting youth in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Tramadol and the precursors used to make kush and are primarily trafficked from Asia, especially China and India, through West African ports and cross-border networks. INL partners with West African law enforcement and criminal justice officials to strengthen interdiction, investigation, and information sharing. Bilateral and regional cooperation includes training through INL's International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA) in Gaborone, Botswana.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO MARGARET H. NARDI BY SENATOR BRIAN SCHATZ

Question. U.S. efforts to combat environmental crimes and reduce the flow of illegally harvested fish, timber, and wildlife entering global supply chains help prevent Lacey Act violations and reduce funding streams for transnational criminal organizations. What is the total level of funding obligated, by account and program, across the State Department to counter illicit wildlife trafficking in each fiscal year 2023 through 2025?

Answer. For INL specifically, we have obligated approximately \$50.2 million in FY 2023 INCLE funds and \$32.5 million in FY 2024 INCLE funds for programs that combat wildlife trafficking (CWT). INL has not yet obligated FY 2025 INCLE funds for CWT.

Question. U.S. efforts to combat environmental crimes and reduce the flow of illegally harvested fish, timber, and wildlife entering global supply chains helps prevent Lacey Act violations and reduce funding streams for transnational criminal organizations. How many International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL) staff

are responsible for international efforts to counter illicit wildlife trafficking as of December 2025 compared to December 2024?

Answer. INL program officers are hired as general program management experts to allow management of any type of INL program. While INL has fewer staff as a result of the Department's reorganization, staffing remains sufficient to provide proper program design and oversight, both domestically and overseas, of programs to combat foreign wildlife trafficking.

Question. Describe the State Department's engagement with U.S. and foreign law enforcement agencies to share resources and intelligence toward more efficient enforcement—particularly in regard to smuggling and trafficking.

Answer. INL supports cross border law enforcement and joint training efforts that improve the ability of partner governments to share resources and intelligence with each other and with U.S. law enforcement. INL partners with U.S. law enforcement agencies to support trusted units and provide training that improves information sharing, case coordination, and operational collaboration to disrupt smuggling and trafficking networks with a U.S. nexus.

Question. What is the State Department's assessment of the lessons learned from U.S. partnerships with African maritime law enforcement entities, and how can such insights be applied to the Pacific context?

Answer. The State Department assesses that African maritime partnerships have been most effective when they are partner-led and aligned with African regional frameworks to foster interoperability, information sharing, and regional cooperation. Applying these lessons in the Pacific, INL will continue to support the Declaration of Partnership between the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency, Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police, Oceania Customs Organization, and Pacific Immigration Development Community by convening Secretariats regularly to enhance Pacific cooperation on maritime domain awareness and law enforcement.

Question. The Africa Maritime Law Enforcement Partnership, including efforts such as Operation Junction Rain, sought to build partner nation's capacity to address maritime threats. What is the total level of funding obligated, by account and program, across the State Department to support maritime security objectives in each fiscal year 2023 through 2025?

Answer. INL works with partners to enhance law enforcement cooperation and improve port and border security. INL does not separately track maritime specific activities, as these are funded within the broader category of law enforcement support provided to our partners.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO RUTH L. PERRY BY SENATOR JEANNE SHAHEEN

Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing

Question. Several IUU fishing programming has either been paused or terminated due to the foreign assistance review. What USAID and State Department programs involving fish conservation and IUU fishing in Africa have been terminated, and which ones are still ongoing?

Answer. Combating illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing remains a priority for the Department. Certain USAID programs transitioned to the State Department, and we are still determining how these and any potential future contributions are in line with the President's April Executive Order to promote and protect the U.S. fishing industry from IUU fishing. The Department remains adequately staffed and resourced to support IUU programs and to provide technical assistance and training to cooperative African nations that in turn advances and advocates for the national security interests of our American fishing industry.

Exclusive Economic Zones

Question. How is the State Department working with our African partners to strengthen their ability to monitor and surveil foreign vessels in their Exclusive Economic Zones and distant waters?

Answer. To enhance government-led counter-IUU fishing programming, the Department of State is leveraging the knowledge, know-how, and capabilities of U.S. companies to increase the capacity of our African partners to monitor and police fishing vessels in their EEZs. One example of this is the adoption of the U.S.-made

SmartMast monitoring system in West Africa, which has boosted countries' maritime domain awareness and created a foundation for increased regional cooperation.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO RUTH L. PERRY BY SENATOR BRIAN SCHATZ

Question. Combatting Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, including via diplomatic outreach and programmatic efforts, is important to protecting U.S. commercial fishing and national security interests, including countering potential security inroads by the People's Republic of China (PRC). What is the total level of funding obligated, by account and program, across the State Department to counter IUU fishing in each fiscal year 2023 through 2025?

Answer. The Department of State recognizes the importance of addressing illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing and is still determining any potential contributions toward IUU fishing efforts as part of ongoing budget and program planning. At this time, the Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs (OES) has not obligated any funds for counter-IUU fishing programs during FY 2023–2025. We remain committed to supporting U.S. interests through diplomatic engagement and interagency coordination.

Question. How many OES staff are responsible for international efforts to counter illicit wildlife trafficking as of December 2025 compared to December 2024?

Answer. OES recognizes the high importance of countering the illegal trade in wildlife, which generates billions of dollars every year for criminal enterprises that also often traffic in drugs and other illegal products. Combating wildlife trafficking contributes to tackling transnational organized crime while leveling the playing field for law-abiding American businesses. OES continues to work to meet Congressional priorities under the END Wildlife Trafficking Act, and the Department of State reorganization has preserved core functions and priorities, including our work to counter illegal trade and protect the interests and security of our American businesses.