



WCO Security Project for West and Central Africa (SPWCA)

OPERATION ALAMBA 2020

FINAL REPORT

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Abbreviations

ATG:	Armed Terrorist Group
BRD:	Intelligence and Documentation Office (Bureau du Renseignement et de la Documentation)
CA:	Central Africa
CUG:	Closed User Group
DGC:	Directorate General of Customs
DRED:	Directorate of Intelligence and Customs Investigations (Direction du Renseignement et des Enquêtes Douanières)
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
INTERPOL:	International Criminal Police Organization
NCP:	National Contact Point
OCU:	Operational Coordination Unit
PGS:	Programme Global Shield
RILO:	Regional Intelligence Liaison Office
SPWCA:	Security Project for West and Central Africa
UN:	United Nations
WA:	West Africa
WCA:	West and Central Africa
WCO:	World Customs Organization

Introduction

In April 2018, the World Customs Organization (WCO), with financing from Japan, launched a new initiative for Customs administrations in West and Central Africa (WCA), centred specifically around the challenges faced by this region in terms of border security. The objective of the WCO Security Project for West and Central Africa (SPWCA) is to help Customs administrations to build their capacities by focusing on Programme Global Shield (PGS), which aims to combat trafficking in, and illegal diversion of, components used to manufacture improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

Awareness-raising and capacity-building activities were launched as part of the project's implementation process.

As regards awareness-raising for the SPWCA, assessment missions were carried out in the participating countries, so that this could be adapted to the national and regional context and the role played by Customs in security matters could be presented to the other defence and security forces to make for more fruitful cooperation.

In October 2019, in a similar vein, at the Conference of WCA regional Customs administrations and development partners in Niamey, the project was involved in bringing the issue to the attention of the Directors General, and, in December 2019, a conference on the African perspective on security challenges was organized in Brussels under the project's umbrella.

As far as capacity building is concerned, two regional train-the-trainers sessions were run by the project for 37 officials from the 15 beneficiary countries, to enable them to familiarize themselves with the chemical precursors and related components used to manufacture Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) – the “weapon of choice” of terrorist groups in the region.

The project then equipped the participating administrations with spectrometers and field kits for detecting and analysing these components so as to undermine the trafficking networks efficiently and effectively.

Operation ALAMBA 2020, which was one of the final stages of the SPWCA, built upon the various activities already undertaken. It was carried out in close cooperation with the two Regional Intelligence Liaison Offices (RILOs) for West and Central Africa.

This final report on Operation ALAMBA 2020 is split into two parts: the first describes the process of implementation of the operation and the second sets out the results achieved.

Part 1: Implementation of Operation ALAMBA 2020

1. General organizational framework

1.1. Context

As mentioned in the introduction, the SPWCA focused on the countries particularly affected by IEDs used by armed terrorist groups (ATGs) in the Sahel and by armed terrorist movements in Central Africa (CA). The Customs administrations of these countries voluntarily joined the SPWCA from its implementation in June 2018 and benefited from close assistance with training and the distribution of equipment so that capacity building could be tailored to the particular challenges.

The countries of the WCA region that took part in the train-the-trainers activities in Ouidah (Benin) in June and August 2019, the pre-operational seminars in Dakar in January and March 2020 and the Operational Coordination Unit (OCU) are as follows: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Togo.

In addition to the 14 participating countries, the RILOs of West Africa (WA) and Central Africa (CA) and the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) were invited to take part in this initiative.

1.2. Objectives

The overall objective, set out in the ALAMBA 2020 operational plan, was to reduce terrorist activities to a minimum by disrupting their logistics networks in the region and to minimize the illegal flow of substances and devices by identifying, locating and intercepting both the chemical precursors and components that are involved in the manufacture of IEDs and the potential facilitators and logistics experts who have links with ATGs.

1.3. Targeted products

The operation focused on chemical precursors, materials and other high-risk devices regarded by the experts as posing the greatest threat of use by terrorists in the region (**see Annex 1**). In addition to the 13 chemical precursors and a metal (aluminium powder, flakes and paste), detonators and associated devices (safety fuses, detonating cords, detonating caps, igniters, fuses) currently monitored as components under Programme Global Shield (PGS), the list of targeted goods also included mercury and cyanide diverted for use in gold mining, and ammunition.

After the adjustments introduced during the pre-operational seminars in Dakar, the SPWCA team ruled out commercial drones and vehicles used by ATGs as targeted products because of the:

- non-existent or disparate regulations on drones;
- impossibility of controlling the import/export flows and the informal market in pick-up trucks within the time frame of the operation.

1.4. Legal framework

As part of Operation ALAMBA 2020, each Customs administration acted in accordance with current national legislation and international conventions. It should be borne in mind that the international legal framework established by Resolution 2253 (2015) and subsequent resolutions of the United Nations (UN) Security Council requires States to eliminate the supply of all kinds of weapons to terrorists. Resolution 70/46 (2015) of the General Assembly of the United Nations, moreover, encourages States to consider supporting the Programme Global Shield, which, according to Report A/71/189 (2016) of the Secretary-General of the UN, is an excellent framework for international cooperation that would benefit from greater support from the Member States.

Exchanges of information, the circulation of intelligence and the investigations needed for seizures, on the basis of the provisions on mutual bilateral and multilateral assistance, did not present any problems at any stage of the operation.

1.5. Organizational rules

The operational and organizational framework of ALAMBA 2020 was set out in the Operational Plan document. This document was shared with all the participating countries and was extensively discussed with the National Contact Points (NCPs) at the pre-operational seminars. The OCU managed the coordination of the operation using the WCO's CENcomm communication tool. The working languages were English and French.

2. Pre-operational phase of the operation

The success of an enforcement operation is heavily dependent on a well-prepared and coordinated pre-operational phase. This is the phase during which the conduct to be followed, the training of teams and the coordination of the operation are defined. In the context of Operation ALAMBA 2020, this phase consisted in creating and testing the ALAMBA 2020 CENcomm platform, appointing the National Contact Points for the operation and the members of the OCU and, lastly, organizing pre-operational training.

2.1. Creation and testing of the ALAMBA 2020 Closed User Group (CUG)

The ALAMBA 2020 Closed User Group (CUG) was created on 9 January 2020 by the WCO's CEN team. Operation ALAMBA 2020 coincided with the roll-out of the new version of CENcomm, known as CENcomm 3. ALAMBA 2020 is the first operation to use this platform.

Once the platform had been set up, access was granted to all the participants in the train-the-trainers sessions that took place in Ouidah, to enable them to familiarize themselves with the tool. A total of 97 user accounts were created, and testing continued until the day before the launch of the operational phase of the operation, on 6 March 2020.

2.2. Appointment of the National Contact Points and members of the OCU

On 4 December 2019, an official letter of invitation to take part in Operation ALAMBA 2020 was sent by the WCO Secretariat to all the member countries of the SPWCA, the RILOs of the WAC region and INTERPOL. The operational plan and a form for appointing the NCPs and members of the OCU were sent along with this letter. All of the countries and organizations, with the exception of INTERPOL, accepted the invitation to take part in the operation.

2.3. Pre-operational training

Two sessions of pre-operational training were held in Dakar in cooperation with the Senegalese Customs. The first session took place from 27 to 31 January 2020. It was restricted to OCU members only.

During this training, the WCO Secretariat presented the security situation in the region and the operational plan for Operation ALAMBA 2020, which was put forward for discussion. After the Secretariat, the Member countries set out their national plans for implementation of the operation and the areas targeted for close monitoring. A presentation of the role of the RILOs in the implementation of Operation ALAMBA provided an opportunity to sum up this first part.

The second part was devoted exclusively to ALAMBA 2020 CENcomm training, based on the new version, CENcomm 3. During this training, the participants had the opportunity to make recommendations to the WCO's CEN team, who took them on board in their entirety. The participants all liked the new version of CENcomm.

The second session, from 2 to 6 March 2020, for the National Contact Points, was exclusively CENcomm training, in so far as it was the NCPs who were responsible for recording the seizures made in their respective countries on the ALAMBA 2020 CENcomm platform. As in the first session, the participants very much liked the new version of CENcomm, which they felt was more user-friendly and easier to navigate.

3. Operational phase

This is the “intensive” phase, characterized by stronger, coordinated controls.

3.1. Duration of the operation

Initially planned for the period from 7 to 22 March 2020, the operational phase of Operation ALAMBA 2020 took place from 7 to 16 March 2020: on account of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the OCU was obliged to suspend its physical activity on 16 March, so that the return of the participants to their respective countries could be organized. However, between 17 and 22 March 2020 the OCU continued its activities virtually.

3.2. Operational Coordination Unit (OCU)

The OCU for Operation ALAMBA 2020 was hosted by the Directorate of Intelligence and Customs Investigations (Direction du Renseignement et des Enquêtes Douanières, DRED) of the Directorate General of Customs (DGC) of Senegal. The DRED accommodates the Intelligence and Documentation Office (Bureau du Renseignement et de la Documentation, BRD), which is the base of the Regional Intelligence Liaison Office (RILO) for West Africa.

The OCU was made up of two members of the SPWCA representing the WCO Secretariat General, two managers from the RILOs for the West and Central Africa region and one representative from each of the project’s member countries. INTERPOL was unable to take part in the operation.

The working hours were split between two teams, each working seven hours (from 07:00 to 14:00 and from 14:00 to 21:00), with possible round-the-clock coverage, and the working languages used were English and French.

3.3. Coordination of the operation

There were two levels of coordination. At national level, the NCPs acted as an interface between officers in the national operational units and the OCU and performed the role of recording, validating and sharing seizure, warning and feedback messages. At OCU level, coordination consisted in maintaining constant contact with the NCPs, encouraging them to play an active role, verifying seizure messages and extracting information for the preparation and distribution of newsletters. Three newsletters were produced.

3.4. Use of ALAMBA 2020 CENcomm

As at 1 April 2020, the CENcomm statistics showed the presence of 97 users, broken down as follows: 24 basic user profiles, 55 National Contact Point profiles, 16 OCU profiles and 2 OCU+ profiles. As regards structured messages, 119 seizure messages (CEN/nCEN) (26 of which during the post-operational phase), eight warning messages and one feedback message were validated and shared. A total of 169 photos of seizures were uploaded onto the platform.

The Operation ALAMBA 2020 participants made recommendations to improve the new version of CENcomm.

4. Post-operational phase

During the pre-operational seminars in Dakar, in consultation with the NCPs and the members of the OCU, the duration of the post-operational phase was set at nine days, from 23 to 31 March, to allow for the discharge of seizures in progress, the completion of litigation proceedings and the consolidation of data for integration into ALAMBA 2020 CENcomm.

In the post-operational phase of Operation ALAMBA 2020, 26 new seizures were identified and recorded on the ALAMBA 2020 CENcomm platform, thus increasing the total number of seizures of the operation. This phase was also the period for participating countries to make their assessments, so that the final report could be drawn up. At the time of drafting of this final report, no participating countries have as yet submitted a report.

The post-operational phase is also an opportunity to conduct an overall evaluation of the operation. An Operation ALAMBA 2020 evaluation session had been scheduled to be held in Douala (Cameroon), but it was cancelled on account of the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead of this, a form will be sent to the members of the OCU and the focal points, so that they can complete an evaluation questionnaire. There will be a debrief on the responses.

Part 2: Results of Operation ALAMBA 2020

The statistics referred to in this report are taken from the ALAMBA 2020 CENcomm platform database that was specially set up for the operation. Some case records have been amended in cooperation with the countries that declared seizure cases. As in the case of the WCO's annual Illicit Trade Report, units have been converted into kg, litres, metres and pieces, depending on the nature of the products.

1. General overview

Fourteen SPWCA member countries and the two RILOs in the WCA region were engaged in Operation ALAMBA 2020 over a period of 16 days. In the course of this operation, **119** seizures were made by the participating countries. This operation, which is concerned with chemical precursors and related materials involved in the manufacture of IEDs and other explosives, saw the seizure of approximately: **39 tonnes of cyanide, 7.4 tonnes of urea, 7,000 metres of safety fuses, 5,200 metres of detonating cords, 800 kg of mercury, 1,052 litres of nitric acid, 220 litres of hydrogen peroxide, 3,704 pieces of ammunition and five units of homemade IEDs.**

2. Countries of seizure

Twelve of the 14 countries taking part in the operation reported cases of seizures recorded on the ALAMBA 2020 CENcomm platform. Mali reported the highest number of seizure cases, followed by Niger and Togo. These three countries recorded more than 57% of the cases on the platform. Benin, Liberia, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Senegal and the Democratic Republic of the Congo also recorded seizures.

All the declaring countries are shown in Table 1 below with the various quantities according to the nature of the goods seized.

Table 1: Breakdown of seizures by country

Country	Number of seizure cases	Quantity (in kg)	Quantity (in litres)	Quantity (in metres)	Quantity (in pieces)
Mali	34	33,306.50	60,650	4,500	2,324,657
Niger	20	21,674	164	2,800	170,460
Togo	14	14,125	23,353.80		1,914,085
Benin	8	122.40	20		4,416,820
Liberia	8	6,038	2,539.35		20,750
Burkina Faso	7	35,094.58		4,900	262,825
Guinea	6	300	445		25
Cameroon	5	34,197			1,586,936
Nigeria	5	296.50	522		
Central African Republic	5	14,556.10	10		4
Senegal	5	1,037,998			3,300
Democratic Republic of the Congo	2	100			2,304
Total	119	1,197,808.08	87,704.15	12,200	10,702,166

3. Customs procedure or direction

Table 2 provides an overview of seizures on the basis of the Customs procedure. This breakdown of seizures according to procedure, illustrated by Figure 1, shows that seizures on import (66.39%) predominate. There is also a high level of seizures made internally.

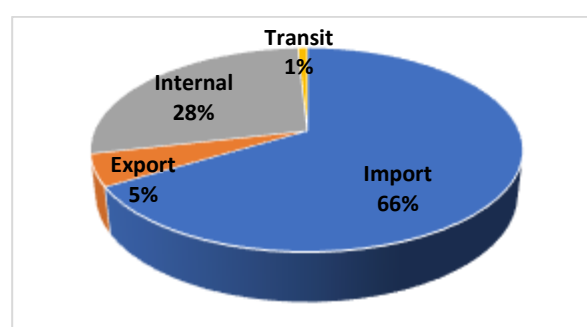
Table 2:

Breakdown of seizures by procedure

Direction	Number of cases	Percentage
Import	79	66.39%
Internal	33	27.73%
Export	6	5.04%
Transit	1	0.84%
Total	119	100.00%

Figure 1:

Breakdown of seizures by procedure



4. Notable routes

First, it is noteworthy that almost all the seizures made during Operation ALAMBA 2020 were from land transport.

Nigeria and Burkina Faso were the main departure countries of the seized goods. They are followed by Benin, Ghana and Guinea. Table 3 shows all the departure countries of the seized goods other than for internal trafficking.

Table 3: Departure countries of seized goods

Departure countries of seized goods	Number of seizure cases
Nigeria	25
Burkina Faso	13
Benin	8
Ghana	6
Guinea	6
Mali	5
Senegal	4
Togo	3
Mauritania	2
Cameroon	2
Sierra Leone	2
China	2
Netherlands	1
Germany	1
Côte d'Ivoire	1
Central African Republic	1
Italy	1
Kenya	1
Algeria	1
Hong Kong, China	1
Total	86

In addition to trafficking between the various countries, internal trafficking is also significant. This traffic may be analysed from the data in Table 4.

Table 4:

Country	Number of internal seizure cases	Total number of seizure cases
Mali	16	34
Senegal	4	5
Togo	4	14
Burkina Faso	2	7
Cameroon	2	5
Niger	2	20
Benin	1	8
Central African Republic	1	5
Democratic Republic of the Congo	1	2

The nature of the traffic can be pinpointed through cross-analysis of internal seizures and the total number of seizures for each country. For Guinea, Liberia and Nigeria, all the seizures are linked to other countries, and the situation is almost the same for Niger and Togo. This means that special attention needs to be paid to monitoring the borders of these countries. Almost the reverse applies in Senegal, where the threat is largely internal, with four out of five seizures being made within the country. For Mali, 47% of seizures are internal to the country.

5. Detection methods

Analysis of the various detection methods that have led to seizures shows that more than half (51.26%) of seizures were made through routine monitoring. The seizures made as a result of investigation and risk profiling combined make up approximately 25%. This shows the room for manoeuvre for Customs administrations in the WCA region to improve seizures. Targeting of precursors and related components of IEDs could be improved through the analysis of further intelligence. Table 5 shows the various detection methods that were used to make seizures.

Table 5: Detection methods leading to seizures

Detection methods	Number of cases	Percentage
Routine monitoring	61	51.26%
Intelligence (including information from informants)	22	18.49%
Investigation	17	14.29%
Risk profiling	14	11.76%
Random selection	5	4.20%
Total	119	100%

6. Products seized

Operation ALAMBA 2020 targeted a certain number of products that called for special surveillance and prescribed controls. However, other fraudulent goods were seized by the various Customs administrations of the member countries, indicating the need for tailored monitoring and differentiated analysis of the products.

6.1. Breakdown of products seized

Figure 2 below shows the breakdown of the products seized.

Figure 2: Breakdown of products seized



A detailed analysis of the products seized under Operation ALAMBA 2020 reveals the presence of chemical precursors and other explosive components, and also other trafficked goods. To be precise, 52% of the seizures were of targeted products, compared with 48% for other products.

6.2. Targeted products seized

Table 6 shows the main targeted products seized during the operation.

Table 6: Targeted products seized during the operation

Products	Kg	Litres	Metres	Pieces
Cyanide	39,245			
Urea	7,422			
Safety fuses			7,000	
Detonating cords			5,200	
Explosive components				4,825
Ammunition				3,704
Nitric acid		1,052		
Mercury	799.50			
Igniters				660
Hydrogen peroxide		220		
Homemade IEDs				5
Total	47,467.50	1,272	12,200	9,194

Other products used in explosives were also seized: for instance, **6,170 kg** of dynamite and **3,301 litres** of sulphuric acid.

6.3. Other products seized

In addition to these targeted goods, Operation ALAMBA 2020 revealed a marked presence of other trafficked products in the WCA region. Table 7 shows the breakdown of product seizures based on the CENcomm classification of goods.

Table 7: Non-targeted goods seized during the operation

Goods	Percentage of seizures
Medicines and pharmaceutical products	55.00%
Narcotics	17.50%
Other prohibitions and restrictions	11.25%
Tobacco	5.00%
Beverages	3.75%
Chemical drug precursors	2.50%
Tax evasion and Customs fraud	2.50%
CITES	1.25%
Currency	1.25%

Table 7 shows a heavy incidence of trafficking in medicines and pharmaceutical products during the operation. More than half (55%) of all non-targeted products were medicines and pharmaceutical products. This is something to be looked into by the WCO programme concerning this issue. The same applies to narcotics trafficking (17.5%), primarily of cannabis.

Conclusion

To date, Operation ALAMBA 2020, the first Programme Global Shield operation in the West and Central Africa region, may be regarded as a success in terms of its operational and organizational record, in spite of an exogenous factor in the form of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This exceptional situation, which cast a shadow over the end of the operational phase, while not jeopardizing its outcome, highlighted the adaptability of the participants and the SPWCA team and the reliability of our CENcomm 3 communication platform, which meant that it was possible to function efficiently in virtual mode.

The quantities of ALAMBA 2020 target products seized (52%) may be summarized as follows: **precursor products precisely targeted by the operational plan (cyanide, urea, etc.), predominantly seized on import through routine monitoring of the circulation of regional traffic, primarily in the Sahel region (Mali, Niger, etc.).**

Comments:

- The percentage of 48% of other seizures (medicines, narcotics) is attributable to systematic monitoring of means of transport carrying various fraudulent goods. The following can be observed:
 - a high number of seizures by Mali and Niger corresponding to the traditional flows of these landlocked countries of the hinterland;
 - for imports, a clear predominance in the Gulf of Guinea: Togo, Benin and Liberia; and
 - overrepresentation of West Africa in terms of seizures, compared with Central Africa.

The following recommendations may be made for a future operation:

Recommendation 1: During the pre-operational training sessions in Dakar, the representatives of participating countries expressed the need for the Directors General of the WCA region to be mobilized regarding the issue of security.

Recommendation 2: The operational phase highlighted a wide diversity in national regulations on targeted products, their legality, their retention and the procedures for seizures and sample taking. Irrespective of national constraints, it is essential for this matter to be examined at regional level.

Recommendation 3: The operational plan for a second operation must establish precise dates for the pre-operational and post-operational phases, while offering the participating countries flexibility, as determined at the pre-operational seminar.

Recommendation 4: The OCU has commented that it would be desirable eventually to bring in Ghana and indeed Sierra Leone. In the case of Ghana, certain seizures have revealed sensitive flows, particularly of powders and explosives destined for gold mining areas. A documented file needs to be compiled and presented to the Ghanaian Commissioner for Customs within a reasonable time frame.

Recommendation 5: INTERPOL did not follow up on the invitation sent to it to participate in ALAMBA 2020. We do not consider it necessary to involve INTERPOL at the OCU level. It is more relevant to rely on local INTERPOL offices, which work very closely with the NCPs of the participating countries.

Finally, it should be borne in mind that the conference on security challenges in Africa that took place in December 2019 in Brussels bore witness to the strong engagement of the participating countries and their realization of the dangers posed to trade by the destabilization of the WCA region, threatened by armed terrorist groups and IEDs.

This engagement, which was materialized in the numerous results achieved during ALAMBA 2020, brought about by the commitment of the 14 countries, is a strong argument in favour of a new initiative in 2021.

Annexes

Annex 1: List of products targeted by the operation

Name of product	HS code	CAS number	UN number
Acetone	291411	67-64-1, 7217-25-6	1090
Aluminium paste	321290		1325
Aluminium powder	760310	7429-90-5	1396
Aluminium flakes	760320	7429-90-5	1396
Ammonium nitrate	310230	6484-52-2	1942, 2067, 2071
Calcium ammonium nitrate	310290		
Double salt of calcium and ammonium nitrate	310260	15245-12-2	
Hydrogen peroxide	284700	7722-84-1	2014, 2015, 2984
Nitric acid	280800	7697-37-2, 43625-06-5, 13587-52-5	1796, 1826, 2031, 2032
Nitromethane	290420	75-52-5	1261
Potassium chlorate	282919	3811-04-9	1485, 2427
Potassium nitrate	283421	7757-79-1	1486
Potassium perchlorate	282990	7778-74-7	1489
Sodium chlorate	282911	7775-09-9	1495, 2428
Sodium nitrate	310250	7632-00-0	1498
Urea	310210	57-13-6	
Detonator	360300		0029, 0030, 0255, 0267, 0360, 0361, 0455, 0456, 0500
Detonating cord	360300		0065, 0285
Igniter	360300		0065, 0289, 0314, 0315, 0325, 0454
Safety fuse	360300		0105
Mercury	280540	7439-97-6	2809
Potassium cyanide	2837	151-50-8	1680, 3413
Sodium cyanide	283711	143-33-9	1689, 3414
Ammunition – firearms Ammunition – other arms	9301, 9302, 9303, 9304, 9305, 9306		0005, 0006, 0007, 0009, 0010, 0012, 0014, 0015, 0016, 0018, 0019, 0020, 0021, 0171, 0243, 0244, 0245, 0246, 0247, 0248, 0297, 0300, 0301, 0303

Name of product	HS code	CAS number	UN number
Explosives for civil uses Explosives for military uses	360100, 360200, 360410, 360490, 360500, 360690		0081, 0082, 0083, 0084
Hand grenades	930690		0110
Explosive devices	9303		
Parts of explosive devices – fuses	360300		0029, 0030, 0255, 0267, 0360, 0361, 0455, 0456, 0500
Unmanned aerial vehicles	880211, 852580, 950300		
Directed energy weapons (lasers)	901310, 901320, 901390		
Vehicles (destroyed) – <i>pick-up and 4x4 type – four-wheel drive</i> (Asian makes)	8703, 8704		

Annex 2: Photos of seizures of targeted goods

Nitric acid seized in Guinea, Mali, Senegal and Togo



Cyanide seized in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger



Ammunition seized in Liberia and Mali



Urea seized in Cameroon and Liberia



Detonating cords seized in Burkina Faso and Niger



Hydrogen peroxide seized in Benin



Igniters seized in Mali



Homemade IEDs seized in Mali

