AFRICA CENTER FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES

ENHANCING FOREST DOMAIN AWARENESS IN CENTRAL AFRICA

REGIONAL EXPERTS ROUNDTABLE
INFORMATION NOTE

WHAT: The Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS) will convene a roundtable on countering illegal logging with experts from the military/police/gendarmerie, forest service, civil society, and regional organizations to analyze how they can co-implement tools and techniques to enhance the sharing of data, analysis, and information about transnational criminal activities in the Central African forest domain.

WHERE: Douala, Cameroon

WHEN: November 19-21, 2024

WHO: The program will target 40 military and civilian experts total, approximately 30 requiring foreign travel, in addition to 5-10 local participants. Approximately 15 experts will come from the military/gendarmerie, civilian defense, and forestry sectors from Cameroon, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon, and the Republic of Congo, to include several alumni at the 05-07 level or civilian equivalent who were at the ACSS July 2023 program on countering illegal logging who work on forest domain awareness; approximately 4 will be civilian and military experts in the forest domain from Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana who attended the 2023 ACSS program; approximately 10 will come from the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Central African Police Chiefs Committee (CAPCCO), the Central African Forest Commission (COMIFAC), Interpol's Regional Bureau, and related regional organizations; and approximately four will come from civil society groups that gather data about illicit trafficking in the forest domain and manage platforms for sharing and analysis. AFRICOM, U.S. Forest Service, and USAID CARPE may be invited as observers. The ACSS Cameroon chapter will also nominate a participant.

WHY: This regional roundtable will build upon demand signals that ACSS received during the multinational program on enhancing security sector coordination to counter illegal logging that it held in July 2023. At that program, participants indicated interest in leveraging different tools and resources that military, police, justice, forestry, and civil society actors have to enhance "forest domain awareness" across countries. Doing so in Central Africa – with its center of gravity around the forests of the Congo Basin, the world's second largest carbon sink – would involve enhancing reliable mechanisms to share information about illegal logging and about actions that state and civil society actors take to counter and prevent it.

There are a variety of efforts underway at regional institutions like CAPPCO, ECCAS, and COMIFAC to counter illegal logging. Between the police, forest services, international NGOs, the Africa TWIX network, INTERPOL, national platforms for information sharing about timber, and commercial satellite imagery, there is considerable analysis and data about the state of Africa's forests and illegal logging. Civil society organizations have developed data tracking, analysis, and information sharing platforms that help certain states inform their work to counter trafficking. Further, there are good examples of state-initiated "multi-actor working groups" to generate forest domain awareness through their audit of foreign-owned concessions and the inclusion of forest community leaders in the analytics of oversight.

While all of these types of data, analysis, and information are needed to counter illegal logging, the current problem is that the knowledge from these different sources is not systematically shared or combined for use by the region's strategic leaders as they make decisions about how to coordinate across agencies and across national borders to counter illegal logging and related organized crime. The roundtable will convene key military and civilian actors whose coordination in the forest domain is essential to countering and building resilience to illegal logging.

HOW: The forum will be in-person for three days, conducted in English and French, and subject to a strict policy of non-attribution. The program will explore the security implications of enhancing coordination between defense, law enforcement, justice, forestry, and civil society actors to counter illegal logging. Participants will assess how to devise responses for data and information collection, processing, analysis, and sharing in the region to enable greater security-related "forest domain awareness." This will be done through a combination of plenary presentations and discussions, demonstration sessions for regional and national databases and related policy analysis, and breakout groups that work through a structured set of exercises to further draft, refine, and tailor a forest domain awareness solution framework that ACSS alumni from the July 2023 program began drafting. The exercises will allow experts to brainstorm responses that fit within countries' national security visions and resource constraints, while also addressing the political economy of illegal logging that makes enhanced "forest domain awareness" necessary.