

Evaluating the Importance of Framing Wildlife Trafficking as a U.S. National Security Threat

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Abstract

Wildlife trafficking has become an international security and natural resource management crisis. The trade of illegal wildlife, fishing, and logging products on the black market is one of the top ten most profitable criminal activities worldwide. Rhinoceros horn and ivory are in particularly high demand on the black market in East Asia, putting rhinoceros and elephant populations at risk of extinction. The illegal wildlife trade is often closely linked to drug and arms trafficking, terrorist organizations, and other crime syndicates across the world. Despite this fact, the illegal trade in wildlife is often characterized as solely an issue of conservation rather than of national security. This study seeks to explore how the consideration of the illegal wildlife trade as a national security risk to the United States would impact the scope and efficacy of the international wildlife trafficking crisis. Using available research, this paper will conduct a literature review of this issue and discuss the domestic and international execution of current U.S. policies, as well as examine the Obama Administration's executive order on combating wildlife trafficking. With original qualitative research, this thesis will explore expert opinions on the feasibility and implications of framing international wildlife trafficking as a national security threat.

INTRODUCTION

Rhinoceros, elephant, pangolin and countless other endangered species have been absolutely decimated throughout the last century, and are standing on the brink of extinction due to anthropogenic actions such as habitat decimation, over-hunting, climate change, and poaching. Over the course of the last decade, international wildlife trafficking has become an international security and natural resource management crisis. For example, rhinoceros used to roam throughout sub-Saharan Africa. Today, 98 percent of rhinos are concentrated in four countries. South Africa is home to 40 percent of the remaining population, and the rest of the individuals are divided amongst Namibia, Zimbabwe, and Kenya (“Rhinoceros,” 2019). Black rhino, in particular, is considered to be critically endangered, with only about 4,000 individuals remaining in the wild. Rhino poaching has increased by 9000 percent from thirteen poached rhinos in 2007 to 1,215 in 2014. Additionally, elephant poaching has increased by 300 percent from 1998 to 2011 (“About the Problem,” 2019).

This drastic increase in poaching across the world has massive implications outside of wildlife conservation. The black-market value of illegal wildlife products is estimated to be \$19 billion per year (“About the Problem,” 2019). Due to the excessive amount of money to be made in this industry, it has attracted the attention of international organized crime from all over the world. This, in turn, contributes to governmental corruption in range states and end-buyer states. In 2017 alone, twenty-one government officials were arrested for poaching-related crimes in South Africa (Bale, 2018). In addition to this, many agencies and organizations that specialize in wildlife trafficking

issues, including the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, believe that wildlife trafficking is used by insurgent groups and terrorist organization throughout Africa to fund their operations. Finally, poaching and wildlife trafficking inherently disenfranchise local populations in range countries. Poaching is a massive driver of biodiversity loss in sub-Saharan Africa, and many communities in these areas are losing access to natural resources they have utilized for generations. Due to all of these reasons, it is imperative that wildlife trafficking is addressed as a security threat, such as drugs and arms trafficking, by the United States in order to increase response capacity and begin to control this crisis on an international level.

The research questions examined in this thesis were twofold:

- Is there a relationship between wildlife trafficking and other security threats, such as organized crime, armed insurgency, and terrorism?
- If so, how does the consideration of the illegal wildlife trade as a security threat to the United States impact the scope and efficacy of the international wildlife trafficking crisis?

METHODS

In order to answer the two research questions listed above, a review of the current literature on wildlife trafficking in general and of the nexus of wildlife trafficking and other forms of crime was conducted. Scholarly articles, international policies, United States domestic policies, congressional testimonies, congressional reports, and executive orders from both the Obama Administration and the Trump Administration were examined in order to obtain a full understanding of the international wildlife trafficking crisis and its relationship with other security threats. Original qualitative research was

also conducted through semi-structured interviews over the phone with three experts in the field of combating illegal wildlife trafficking. These individuals were:

- Daniel Ashe, the current president and CEO of the Association of Zoos & Aquariums and the former Director of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service
- Robert Dreher, the current senior vice president for Conservation Programs of Defenders of Wildlife and the former Associate Director of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service
- John Cruden, the current principal at the environmental law firm Beveridge & Diamond PC and the former Assistant Attorney General of the Department of Justice's Environment and Natural Resources Division (ENRD)

The interviews with Daniel Ashe and Robert Dreher each lasted an hour, and the interview with John Cruden lasted thirty minutes. Interview topics included the following:

- Combating wildlife trafficking as a policy priority for the Obama Administration, under which all three individuals worked
- The United States Fish and Wildlife Service's law enforcement mechanisms for combating the illegal wildlife trade domestically and abroad
- Differences in the handling of wildlife trafficking as a security threat as opposed to a conservation issue
- The marriage of criminality between wildlife trafficking and other forms of illegal activity, including organized crime, terrorism, and armed insurgency

LITERATURE REVIEW

Wildlife Trafficking Defined

The United States Fish and Wildlife Service defines wildlife trafficking as, "The unlawful harvest of and trade in live animals and plants or parts and products derived

from them” (*Illegal wildlife trade*, 2019). The primary forms of consumption of illegally traded products include exotic pets, trophies, luxury items, souvenirs, religious and cultural items, food, and traditional medicines (*Illegal wildlife trade*, 2019).

Current Efforts

Currently, there are policies in place to combat wildlife trafficking on the international and domestic scale.

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species

The United Nations Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) is the international treaty that governs the global wildlife trade. There are 178 nations that have voluntarily joined CITES since it first entered into force in 1975 (Wyatt, 2013, p.133). By joining, countries agree to financially support CITES and to implement domestic policies that are in line with the CITES licensing system. The licensing system sets up three appendices which establish the amount and type of trade that is permitted for a specific species and the kinds of permits that are necessary for trade within an appendix. Species listed on Appendix I are banned from international trade except in a few specific circumstances. Almost all species of rhinoceros and elephant are listed under Appendix I. Species listed on Appendix II are subject to quotas put in place to ensure the sustainability of species’ populations. Species listed on Appendix III are under the protection of at least one party to CITES that is seeking the help of other member countries to control trade in that species (Wyatt, 2013, p.133). In the United States, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the agency responsible

for the federal government's application of CITES ("Species Information: Rhinos," 2018).

CITES has several strengths and weaknesses that impact the illegal wildlife trade. It has been and continues to be effective in encouraging stricter border monitoring for illegal wildlife, increasing public awareness of wildlife trafficking, and establishing a regulatory regime that is widely accepted. However, CITES is considered to be fairly weak in the sense that all international law is: membership and compliance are completely voluntary and there are no specific law enforcement mechanisms within the treaty (Wyatt, 2013, p. 151).

Rhinos and their products, for example, were some of the first species to be placed on the CITES Appendices in 1977. All species of rhinoceros were placed on Appendix I, banning international trade in the entire family of rhinos and their products from that date onward (Leader-Williams, 2002, p. 92). Despite the ban, the illegal trade in rhino horn persisted throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. The black rhinoceros especially suffered during this time. The species became locally extinct within at least eighteen range states in Africa. This continued decline of rhinos led the parties to CITES to pass a series of resolutions to strengthen the ban. By 1992, the governments of South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Namibia began to express their dissatisfaction with the ban on trade. They asserted that controlled legal trade in rhino horn might be a better option. Both Zimbabwe and South Africa had, and still have, large stockpiles of rhinoceros horn and ivory through seizures from smugglers, natural deaths of the animals, and legal rhino dehorning operations, and clearly had a self-interest in a legalized trade. Their proposals

were rejected by the other parties. The United States government threatened sanctions suspending any wildlife and fisheries trade between the U.S. and any state deemed responsible for diminishing the effectiveness of an international treaty protecting a threatened or endangered species. The African governments responded by passing domestic legislation to intensify efforts to control the illegal trade; however, this simply resulted in the illegal trade going further underground and the inflation of black-market prices of rhino horn (Leader-Williams, 2002, p. 94).

Today, some conservations in South Africa are still calling for an end to the international ban on the trade of rhino horn and ivory. They argue that rhinos can be sustainably bred and their horns harvested, and the sale of their stockpiles of ivory would generate funds that would be returned to wildlife conservation. If rhino horn is cut off, it grows back in approximately twenty months, as it is made of keratin, the same protein that is in human fingernails. In their opinion, this practice would bolster rhino populations, albeit domesticated populations, while flooding the Asian markets with legally obtained horns, therefore driving down the black-market price and demand. South Africa has declared that its regulatory system is prepared for the task of ensuring a controlled trade that “will depress black-market prices and activity,” and that they have done everything in their power to conserve rhino populations under the ban, yet it is still not working (Christy, 2016).

This tactic was attempted in 2007 when the CITES parties temporarily suspended the international ban on the ivory trade and authorized Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe to sell 115 tons of stockpiled ivory to China and Japan. The goal of the

one-time sale was to flood the Asian markets with legally obtained ivory and drive out illegal sellers. Instead, the sale simply signaled to wildlife traffickers that the ivory markets were open again and fueled unprecedented elephant poaching throughout Africa (Christy, 2016).

In addition, the South African government is rife with corruption in regard to poaching and wildlife trafficking involvement. As stated above, in 2017 twenty-one government officials were arrested for poaching-related crimes, calling the government's capacity to effectively control a legalized trade into question. Lack of coordination between South African law enforcement and government agencies also greatly hinders conservation efforts there (Bale, 2018). Richard Thomas, a spokesman for the wildlife trade monitoring organization TRAFFIC, stated, "Clearly poachers will go for the easiest targets, and if South Africa's main crime-fighting institutions are failing to coordinate their efforts to prevent poaching effectively, then the country's rhinos will inevitably be targeted" (Bale, 2018).

United States Domestic Policy

The United States has worked to combat wildlife trafficking through domestic legislation, including the Endangered Species Act, the Rhinoceros and Tiger Conservation Act, the African Elephant Conservation Act, and the Lacey Act. These statutes are administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and utilized by the Department of Justice's Environment and Natural Resources Division to prosecute wildlife traffickers attempting to enter the United States (Wyler & Sheikh, 2013).

Wildlife traffickers are also often prosecuted for smuggling, money laundering, and criminal conspiracy.

There is also policy precedent in the United States for severe economic sanctions on countries that are directly or indirectly engaging in trade or endangered species that is undermining international conservation goals under the 1971 Pelly Amendment to the Fishermen's Protective Act of 1967. Recently, advocates have been urging the U.S. government to impose these sanctions upon Vietnam and China for their roles in the trade of illegal wildlife products. Others argue that these measures are too severe or otherwise impractical, depending on the policy priorities of the administration in power (Wylar & Sheikh, 2013).

Endangered Species Act

Perpetrators caught processing, trading, or negatively impacting any endangered species listed in the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in the United States are subject to prosecution under the ESA ("Species Information: Rhinos," 2018). The ESA provides a framework for continued conservation and protection of endangered and threatened species and their habitats ("Species Information: Rhinos," 2018). Even if a species does not have any natural habitat in the United States, the law functions to allow investigation and prosecution of those who are trafficking endangered species or their products within the U.S. Species listed on the ESA receive absolute protection from the federal government.

Rhinoceros and Tiger Conservation Act

The Rhinoceros and Tiger Conservation Act established the Rhinoceros and Tiger Conservation Fund (Fund) in 1994, which works to support groups working in conservation efforts for rhinoceros and tiger species around the world. The Fund has a goal of restoring rhino and tiger populations to healthy numbers in the wild. The Fund has supported conservation work such as anti-poaching efforts, habitat and ecosystem management, the establishment of nature reserves, the development of community conservation initiatives, the management of human-wildlife conflict, and the promotion of public awareness of conservation and environmental efforts. In 2017, the program contributed \$4.8 million to fifty-seven projects in fourteen countries and was matched by nearly \$11.1 million in partner contributions through grants. Several of these projects were aimed at specifically targeting rhinoceros poaching in Kenya, Zambia, and Zimbabwe (“Rhinoceros and Tiger Conservation Fund,” 2018).

African Elephant Conservation Act

Congress passed the African Elephant Conservation Act (Act) in 1988. The Act established the African Elephant Conservation Fund (Fund), “to help protect, conserve, and manage African elephants” (“African Elephant Conservation Fund,” 2019). The Fund emphasizes the improvement of protection for elephants in nations where the poaching is not controlled well. Additionally, the Fund seeks to implement conservation of elephants throughout their range in Africa. The Fund awarded eighteen grants in 2018, distributing \$3.4 for program support in thirteen different countries (“African Elephant Conservation Fund,” 2019).

Lacey Act

The Lacey Act was passed in 1900, making it the first federal law protecting wildlife. The Lacey Act states that it is illegal “to import, export, sell, acquire, or purchase fish, wildlife, or plants that are taken, possessed, transported, or sold: 1) in violation of U.S. or Indian Law, or 2) in interstate or foreign commerce involving any fish, wildlife, or plants taken, possessed, or sold in violation of State or foreign law” (“Lacey Act,” 2018). This law covers all fish and wildlife and their products, and all flora and fauna protected by CITES and protected by state law. The Lacey Act enforces civil and criminal punishments for illegally trading plants and animals, regulates the importation of any species protected by international or domestic law, and prevents the spread of invasive species in the United States (“Lacey Act,” 2018). The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service also manages the Lacey Act Rewards Account, which can be utilized to fund rewards for information leading to a conviction under the Lacey Act (Wylar & Sheikh, 2013).

Executive Order on Combating Wildlife Trafficking

In 2013, the Obama Administration released Executive Order 13648 on Combating Wildlife Trafficking, making the United States’ response to this issue a policy priority for the administration (Executive Order No. 13648, 2013). In the executive order, the Administration states that “Poaching operations have expanded beyond small-scale, opportunistic actions to coordinated slaughter commissioned by armed and organized criminal syndicates” (Executive Order No. 13648, 2013). The executive order outlines how wildlife trafficking robs communities of the benefits of their own natural resources

while generating billions of dollars in profits for criminal organizations, fueling governmental instability and undermining security on an international scale.

The executive order established the Presidential Task Force on Wildlife Trafficking (Task Force). This was a body made up of experts in the field across federal agencies, including all three experts interviewed for this thesis. The Task Force is co-chaired by the Secretary of State, Secretary of the Interior, and the Attorney General. The co-chairs report to the President through the National Security Advisory. In addition to the co-chairs, the Task Force is made up of senior-level representatives from the Department of the Treasury, the Department of Defense, the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Commerce, the Department of Transportation, the Department of Homeland Security, the United States Agency for International Development, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, the National Security Staff, the Domestic Policy Council, the Council on Environmental Quality, the Office of Science and Technology Policy, the Office of Management and Budget, and the Office of the United States Trade Representative (Executive Order No. 13648, 2013). The purpose of the Task Force is to bolster interagency collaboration in combating wildlife trafficking through “effective support for anti-poaching activities; coordinating regional law enforcement efforts; developing and supporting effective legal enforcement mechanisms; developing strategies to reduce illicit trade and reduce consumer demand for trade in protected species” (Executive Order No. 13648, 2013). The Task Force is no longer active under the Trump Administration.

Additionally, the executive order implemented the Advisory Council on Wildlife Trafficking (Advisory Council), which brought in experts across the non-profit and private sectors to aid the federal government in the fight against wildlife trafficking. The purpose of the Advisory Council is to “make recommendations to the Task Force and provide it with ongoing advice and assistance” (Executive Order No. 13648, 2013). The Advisory Council was designed to promote intersectoral collaboration and to bring in experts from outside of the federal government to offer fresh perspectives on the fight against wildlife trafficking. The Advisory Council is no longer active under the Trump Administration.

The Obama Administration also released the National Strategy for Combating Wildlife Trafficking (Strategy) along with the executive order, outlining the administration's plan for the execution of the executive order. The Strategy implemented a three-pronged plan: strengthen enforcement, reduce demand, and expand international cooperation and commitment.

The Strategy sought to strengthen enforcement by improving coordination among federal agencies and prioritizing “wildlife trafficking across enforcement, regulatory, and intelligence agencies” (National Strategy for Combating Wildlife Trafficking, 2014). Supporting partner nations in their efforts to build their own domestic enforcement capacities through the provision of assistance for field-level conservation efforts and working to dismantle international trafficking networks is also included within strengthening enforcement section of the Strategy.

The Strategy sought to reduce demand for illegally traded wildlife by increasing public awareness of the negative impacts of wildlife trafficking across sectors through public outreach and diplomacy abroad. The Strategy asserted that as long as consumer demand is high, criminals will continue to illegally kill and traffic animals. By encouraging consumers to examine their purchasing patterns and knowing where their products are coming from, the U.S. hoped to decrease demand in end-buyer countries (National Strategy for Combating Wildlife Trafficking, 2014).

Finally, the Strategy sought to expand international cooperation and commitment through diplomacy, mobilizing global support for combating wildlife trafficking. This section of the Strategy outlined the U.S. government's goal to strengthen the implementation of preexisting international agreements to protect wildlife and to build new partnerships internationally across sectors to promote conservation efforts throughout the world (National Strategy for Combating Wildlife Trafficking, 2014).

Post-Executive Order Developments

The executive order brought about some developments in how the federal government combats wildlife trafficking, which was the primary topic of discussion during the expert interviews.

The most important change the executive order enacted was requiring interagency collaboration through the Task Force. During his interview, Daniel Ashe stated, “[The executive order] really transformed the engagement of the United States because it brought into play people from very powerful institutional forces that focus on criminal activity, as opposed to wildlife conservation” (D. Ashe, personal communication,

February 8, 2019). The Task Force brought agencies such as the Department of State's division of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL), the Department of Defense, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) into the fold of combating illegal wildlife trafficking. This interagency collaboration increased available funding and resources for combating the illegal wildlife trade. The executive order also increased the international engagement and law enforcement capability of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service). The Service was able to increase the number of attachés specializing in wildlife trafficking in embassies throughout the world, and that number has continued to increase into the Trump Administration (R. Dreher, personal communication, February 20, 2019).

In 2012, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton requested that the intelligence community conduct a threat assessment in order to determine if wildlife trafficking represents a security threat to American interests. While this assessment did not come to fruition at the time, an evaluation of this type in the future could potentially play a large role in increasing the number of resources allocated to responding to wildlife crimes through legislative action, rather than executive orders that are subject to the political will of the party in power (Wylar & Sheikh, 2013).

Four Affected Areas of Security

The illegal trade in wildlife has broad security implications across sectors. There are four primary areas of security that are affected by wildlife trafficking.

Environmental Security

Wildlife trafficking has a massive negative impact on environmental security. The illegal taking and trade in wildlife disrupt ecosystems due to loss of biodiversity through poaching and the accumulation of excessive amounts of wildlife. This biodiversity loss disrupts environmental stability for the lasting survival of humans and other species in the affected regions. The illegal wildlife trade also provides a mechanism for the introduction of invasive species and diseases, due to smuggled products not facing routine checks when coming in and out of various ports. This further threatens the health and safety of humans, native ecosystems, domesticated animals, and food industries (Wyatt, 2013, p. 134).

Human Security

Wildlife trafficking impacts human security in similar ways that it impacts environmental security. The unregulated disease transmission caused by smuggled wildlife bypassing required health inspections may become a serious public health problem. Additionally, poaching and the responsive conservation efforts that go along with it put the lives of bystanders, poachers, and rangers at risk every day. Many range countries in sub-Saharan Africa are treating this crisis as if it is a war, utilizing shoot-to-kill tactics and military training for park rangers (Wyatt, 2013, p. 138).

Economic Security

Wildlife trafficking also drives economic insecurity. Many industries and livelihoods rely on the natural resources provided by healthy ecosystems. Half of the world's jobs are directly associated with fisheries, forestry, or agriculture (Wyatt, 2013, p. 140). Healthy ecosystems and sustainable utilization of natural resources are absolutely

crucial to the continued viability of these industries and job markets. Additionally, many rural communities throughout sub-Saharan Africa rely on large, charismatic mammals such as elephants and rhinoceros for eco-tourism in those areas. These species' populations have been decimated by poaching over the last several decades, making them increasingly inaccessible for eco-tourism purposes (Wyatt, 2013, p. 140).

National Security

Finally, wildlife trafficking threatens national security. Many of the environmental, human, and economic threats listed above also contribute to threats of national security. Forced migrations driven by environmental degradation and limited agricultural opportunities due to biodiversity loss greatly impact the stability of national governments. As stated above, inter-human conflict over limited natural resources and the war-like environment surrounding poaching and wildlife trafficking also threatens public safety and governmental stability. The largest threat to national security posed by wildlife trafficking is the trade's relationship with other forms of illicit trade, organized crime, governmental corruption, terrorism, and armed insurgency. These issues work to disrupt governmental stability all over the world (Wyatt, 2013, p. 141).

Wildlife trafficking leads to governmental corruption in several ways. Bribery of government officials is a key component of smuggling operations of all types, including wildlife trafficking. Law enforcement officers and politicians may relax border crossings for personal profits or to assist in the funding of insurgency against legitimate governments (Wyatt, 2013, p. 144). Corrupt high-level officials who are involved in the illegal wildlife trade may choose not to implement or enforce domestic laws in

compliance with CITES. Sometimes corrupt officials may be operating individually, or systematically. For example, it is believed that the North Korean government as a whole participates in the illegal wildlife trade (Wyatt, 2013, p. 143).

The Obama Administration was very confident that wildlife trafficking had connections to many other forms of illicit activity. During his time as Assistant Attorney General of the Department of Justice's Environment and Natural Resources Division (DOJ ENRD), John Cruden gave congressional testimony on the oversight of the DOJ ENRD, in which he stated, "Reports from the State Department and elsewhere indicate that transnational criminal organizations, including some terrorist networks, armed insurgent groups, and narcotics trafficking organizations, are increasingly drawn to wildlife trafficking due to the exorbitant proceeds from this illicit trade" (Oversight of the Environment and Natural Resources Division, 2015).

Organized crime is known to combine the illegal wildlife trade with forms of illicit trade, such as arms, drug, and human trafficking. These international criminal syndicates utilize the same established smuggling networks for all of their products, making entering into the illegal wildlife trade fairly low-cost for them. For example, half of the criminals prosecuted for wildlife trafficking in the United Kingdom had been previously convicted for drug possession, violent crimes, theft, or illegal possession of a firearm. Additionally, 40 percent of drug seizures in Brazil contain illegal wildlife, as well. Organized crime has been found to be involved in wildlife trafficking in Germany, Japan, Russia, China, Vietnam, and the United States (Wyatt, 2013, p. 148).

Wildlife trafficking has also been linked with armed insurgency and terrorism. Multiple rebel and militia groups throughout the elephant ranges of Africa are known to poach ivory. Sudanese rebel groups have been found poaching ivory and trading it with other organizations in exchange for weapons. Somali militiamen are encouraged to poach ivory rather than receiving a monetary payment for their service. Militias in Mozambique and Angola have been found systematically poaching ivory in order to turn a profit (Wyatt, 2013, p. 146). Finally, Russian wildlife trade experts believe that Chechen and Middle Eastern terrorist organizations have poached and sold endangered falcons in Russia in order to help fund their training camps there (Wyatt, 2013, p. 145).

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Due to the extremely limited amount of hard data in this area of study, I employ highly qualitative data and rely largely on interviews with the three experts listed above. My work compiles the expert testimonies to offer insight as to how the United States combats wildlife trafficking, how those processes shifted after the Obama Administration's executive order, and the broader security implications of wildlife trafficking. The results suggest that all of the experts were in agreement that wildlife trafficking should be handled as a security threat and not just a conservation issue, due to its ties with other forms of international crime.

Daniel Ashe

During his interview, Daniel Ashe focused primarily on how the Obama Administration's Executive Order on Combating Wildlife Trafficking enhanced the United States' enforcement capabilities. He talked about the importance of framing

wildlife trafficking as a security threat because “the language that really speaks to people with power is law enforcement, international crime, and national security” (D. Ashe, personal communication, February 8, 2019). He stated that today, the Department of State INL is the primary funder of anti-wildlife trafficking programs overseas. He said that while the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service plays a crucial role in combating wildlife trafficking, the Service just does not have the kind of funding that INL and other law enforcement agencies have. For that reason, it is crucial to frame wildlife trafficking as a threat to national security in order to maximize enforcement capacity across the federal government.

Ashe then detailed some of the law enforcement mechanisms that became possible once federal agencies specializing in security issues. He talked about how officials utilized phone networking to trace the calls of known traffickers to build a neural network of communication overlapping wildlife trafficking with drug trafficking. This verified that the same criminal organizations that participate in other forms of illicit trade also participate in wildlife trafficking, utilizing their established networks to traffic different products (D. Ashe, personal communication, February 8, 2019)

Robert Dreher

During his interview, Robert Dreher discussed the law enforcement mechanisms that the United States Fish and Wildlife Service utilized to combat wildlife trafficking. He stated that the Service has attachés placed in embassies around the world that specialize in combating wildlife trafficking in those countries. He said, “They liaise with the host country’s law enforcement agencies, as well as all of the U.S. agencies that are

engaged with programs funding wildlife conservation” (R. Dreher, personal communication, February 20, 2019). These individuals work to build networks within the host countries for international collaboration, and pressure and persuade range states, such as Kenya and Botswana, to raise the penalties for wildlife crimes there.

Dreher also discussed the bipartisan nature of the wildlife trafficking issue and its support on both sides of the aisle. He said that the Obama Administration’s executive order had strong bipartisan support from Republican congressmen on the House Natural Resources Committee and the House Foreign Affairs Committee that viewed combating wildlife trafficking as “essential to protect the patrimony of mankind and also as a law enforcement activity” (R. Dreher, personal communication, February 20, 2019). Dreher believes that because fighting wildlife trafficking was characterized as a law enforcement commitment rather than a conservation commitment by the Obama Administration, it helped garner bipartisan support and improved interagency collaboration.

Dreher also pointed out that while not much action has been taken on combating wildlife trafficking under the Trump Administration, President Trump did mention it in Executive Order 13773. In this executive order, President Trump called for a comprehensive approach to dismantling organized crime syndicates and explicitly recognized the link between wildlife trafficking and transnational criminal syndicates (Executive Order No. 13773, 2017). Dreher also explained that while the Presidential Task Force is no longer active, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has “kept its head down and continued fighting wildlife trafficking” (R. Dreher, personal communication, February 20, 2019). Dreher believed it to be significant that President Trump rescinded

virtually ever executive order implemented by the Obama Administration, but did not rescind the Executive Order on Combating Wildlife Trafficking.

John Cruden

Being the former Assistant Attorney General for DOJ ENRD, John Cruden answered the interview questions from a legal perspective rather than an administrative one. Cruden discussed his congressional testimony, in which he stated that the Department of Justice and the Department of State believes that there is a marriage of criminality between the illegal wildlife trade and other forms of criminal activity. Cruden also discussed how valuable the Department of Defense was on the Task Force in providing information on the wildlife trade's connection with other security threats. He stated that after the Obama Administration's Executive Order, security agencies, such as the Department of Defense, began handling wildlife trafficking as a security threat. This was a very effective strategy in combating the illegal trade (J. Cruden, personal communication, March 25, 2019). Cruden also stated that the international law enforcement agency Interpol developed a new division on wildlife trafficking during this time. This, in turn, bolstered the international law enforcement capacity on this issue.

Cruden also discussed the presence of the connection between illegal wildlife trafficking and other forms of crime in the cases he prosecuted as Assistant Attorney General of DOJ ENRD. During this part of the interview, he spoke vaguely in order to not reveal any classified information. The classification of information on cases like this contributes to the lack of publicly available data on this issue. Cruden stated that the Department of Justice believed it to be "highly likely that some of that illegal money

[from wildlife trafficking] was actually getting to terrorist groups, and that they were, in fact, being funded in that regard” (J. Cruden, personal communication, March 25, 2019). He then went on to discuss the level of sophistication necessary to poach and smuggle illegal wildlife products internationally. Due to the complexity of the networks required to illegally trade these types of products internationally, Cruden asserted that it is reasonable to assume that the organizations that are partaking in the illegal wildlife trade are doing so with preexisting smuggling networks, used for other illicit products (J. Cruden, personal communication, March 25, 2019).

Cruden closed the interview by discussing what he believes is necessary for combating wildlife trafficking into the future. He talked about the importance of effective prosecution of individual cases, strong legislation that addresses this issue as a security threat to the United States, and demand reduction initiatives through public education and awareness as the three most important steps the United States could be taking to address the wildlife trafficking crisis moving forward (J. Cruden, personal communication, March 25, 2019).

DISCUSSION

Based on the findings of this thesis, current efforts to combat international wildlife trafficking are insufficient, as the problem has only intensified over the course of the last decade. The illegal trade in wildlife is a security threat due to the severity of the problem and its connections with militant and terrorist organizations, organized criminal syndicates, armed insurgent groups, and foreign military units. Through these actors’ participation in poaching and wildlife trafficking, they continue to threaten the social,

political, and economic stability of countries, breed governmental corruption (as seen in South Africa), and encourage violence in the name of the lucrative black-market trade (Wyler & Sheikh, 2013).

If wildlife trafficking was considered a national security threat to the United States, a significantly larger amount of funding would be available for foreign aid, as well. The United States could increase the amount of available aid in the Rhinoceros and Tiger Conservation Fund and the African Elephant Conservation Fund to provide financial assistance to African governments for conservation efforts in national parks, wildlife refuges, and preserves to ensure they may be as aggressive as possible with their anti-poaching efforts. The positive impact of increased funding for wildlife management cannot be understated. This is exhibited in South Africa's Kruger National Park, where rhino poaching decreased by twenty-four percent in 2017. The park, once a hotspot for rhino poaching, has employed an aggressive anti-poaching strategy that involves specialized training for park rangers, improved radio communications, the utilization of anti-poaching canine units to track suspected poachers, improved coordination and collaboration with law enforcement in bordering Mozambique, and new surveillance technology. These efforts have been incredibly expensive for the park, and much of the funding that supports these efforts comes from private donors, such as Warren Buffet (Bale, 2018). If the United States could allocate funds to promote conservation efforts throughout Africa, the standard set by Kruger National Park could be replicated throughout the continent. In order to allocate a considerable amount of funds for foreign anti-poaching efforts, the federal government must shift the language surrounding

wildlife trafficking from an environmental problem to a threat to American national security interests.

Emerging Themes

First and foremost, wildlife trafficking as a whole is under-researched and poorly understood. Specifically, its relationship with security threats requires more hard data in order for this issue to be fully understood and effectively combatted. However, there is strong anecdotal evidence of a marriage of criminality between wildlife trafficking and other forms of criminal activity. However, more research must be done on this in order for more informed policies to be developed. The Obama Administration's Executive Order on Combating Wildlife Trafficking allowed interagency collaboration, as well as increased funding and resource allocation for combating the illegal wildlife trade domestically and abroad. This, in turn, may have had a positive impact on the international crisis, as seen in the slight decrease in numbers of poached rhinoceros and elephants since 2014, the year the executive order was put into place.

Policy Recommendations

This report seeks to offer some policy recommendations based on the emerging themes from the research. Firstly, increased research and transparency in this field by academics, as well as the conservation and security communities, is critical in order to develop effective, robust policies to combat illegal wildlife trafficking. Specifically, more information on the structure and the perpetration of the trade is crucial, as well as its nexus with other forms of illicit activity.

Secondly, based on the findings in this report, it is imperative that the treatment of wildlife trafficking begin permanently shifting from an issue of conservation to one of security through legislative action. This, in turn, would promote intersectoral collaboration in the United States and abroad, and allow for a multifaceted approach in combating the illegal wildlife trade, along with international criminal syndicates, terrorist organizations, and armed insurgent groups.

Finally, demand reduction initiatives based in the end-buyer countries with the highest consumption rates (China and Vietnam) are also crucial in controlling international wildlife trade. Demand for poached products is the primary driver of the illegal trade. By increasing public outreach and education, people can learn about the consequences of the consumption of these illegal products.

Shifting the treatment of wildlife trafficking from a conservation issue to a security threat would also have an impact on the expansion of the role and reach of CITES. The Convention would take a more prominent role in the United Nations, allowing the authorities of member states to be included in the U.N. dialogue surrounding international security. Additionally, it would increase awareness of the severity of international wildlife trafficking around the world. Finally, elevating wildlife trafficking to a security threat would increase funding for CITES, enhancing its oversight capability and offering the opportunity for the possible creation of a CITES law enforcement unit (Wyatt, 2013, p. 149).

Framing wildlife trafficking as a national security threat would also give the United States better leverage to encourage other parties to CITES to put serious pressure

on horn-consuming states, such as China and Vietnam, through the use of sanctions to enforce the ban on the illegal trade of wildlife. In October 2018, the Chinese government rolled back a decades-old ban on the traditional medicinal trade of rhino horn and tiger bone sourced from farmed animals. There is no scientific evidence that either of these products has any medicinal value. While China did not officially relax restrictions on rhino and tiger products from wild sources or their import and export, this decision will make enforcement of these restrictions extremely difficult due to the challenge of differentiating between poaching and farmed animals. Conservation groups are warning that this will have “devastating consequences” for wild rhinoceros and tiger populations (Shih, 2018).

CONCLUSION

While the United States is working domestically and internationally to combat international wildlife trafficking, the federal government could be doing much more. If the federal government were to shift the issue of wildlife trafficking from one of environmental conservation to a legitimate security threat, more funds would be available to allocate to conservation efforts around the world. Additionally, taking a hard economic stance against countries that openly, albeit implicitly, endorse poaching activities through the consumption of the spoils, would make a drastic show of strength that would demonstrate the severity of this international crisis.

Countless species are staring into the void of extinction. As the threats against them are man-made, so must be the comprehensive conservation efforts that will save them. Without immediate human intervention and aggressive conservation reforms, many

of these species with cease to exist in the wild. It is the responsibility of individuals and governments across the world to collaborate to turn the tide against poaching and international wildlife trafficking.

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