

**Statement for the Record**

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**By**

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**Senate Committee on Foreign Relations**

**Regarding**

**‘Confronting Drug Trafficking in West Africa’**

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Chairman Feingold, Ranking Member Isakson, and Distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the threat posed by drug trafficking and related security issues in West Africa. The security challenges facing West Africa today, above and beyond drug trafficking and abuse are enormous. However, I believe it will be abundantly clear by the end of this hearing that most of the security threats facing this region are in large part driven by, or certainly related to, powerful drug trafficking cartels from Latin America and Mexico that have taken root on the African Continent. What is even more ominous are the broader strategic threats, the by-product if you will, this activity has, and will continue to produce.

Mr. Chairman let me say up front; that each of you on this subcommittee, and your colleagues throughout Congress, should be praised for all that you have done to support the multi-faceted counternarcotics efforts of our Nation, and many other countries around the globe. I appreciate the fact that it is in that spirit you called us here today, to determine what we can do to help Africa with this dangerous and highly volatile situation.

Before entering the private sector on November 1 of last year, I served for almost four years as the Assistant Administrator and Chief of Operations with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, and for one year as the Agency's Acting Chief of Intelligence. I also served in a number of DEA offices throughout the United States, including service on both our Southern and Northern borders, on both our East and West Coasts, in the Midwest, as well as approximately three years in various countries in Latin America and Iraq. It is through my 34 years in law enforcement that I sit before you today, deeply concerned about drug trafficking and related security threats playing out in West Africa. You will receive a career, federal narcotics agent's perspective on what is happening in West Africa, and how that region has become an important link in the global cocaine trade.

### **West Africa Assumes an Important Role in the Global Cocaine Trade**

The reasons for the increased drug flows into West Africa, involving principally cocaine from Latin America and Mexico, are many and varied. Demand for cocaine has increased dramatically in many parts of Europe, and the best estimates are that approximately 400 to 500 metric tons of cocaine is destined for Europe this year from Latin American and Mexican drug cartels. Consequently, West Africa now plays a critical role in connecting cocaine transiting the Atlantic Ocean from Latin America and Mexico to destinations throughout Europe and elsewhere. Think of it this way: West Africa has become to Europe what Central America, the Caribbean and Mexico are to the United States with respect to cocaine trafficking. It has always been about the money for global drug trafficking cartels; greed being their single most important motivator. Colombian and Mexican drug cartels, which operate with Fortune 100 corporate efficiencies, also recognize the current value of the Euro over the dollar, and are successfully capitalizing on this lucrative upshot in the present global economic state of affairs.

I believe there are other important reasons for this shift in global cocaine trafficking trends. U.S. law enforcement and our military, working shoulder-to-shoulder with our Mexican, Caribbean and Latin American partners, have hit the Latin American and Mexican drug cartels hard over the past few years with record breaking seizures of drugs, cash and precursor chemicals. For over two years now, we have witnessed ever-increasing prices for cocaine throughout the United States, and ever decreasing levels of the drug's purity. This phenomenon is unprecedented and I do not believe we have experienced anything quite like it for a very long time—if ever.

The Latin American and Mexican drug cartels are also experiencing enormous pressures in their own neck of the woods—in their own respective countries, and throughout the Western Hemisphere. Consequently, they are looking to develop and expand new markets, and Europe has naturally emerged as the perfect, latest playground for these ruthless cartels. I have been told many times by my European law enforcement colleagues, that they do not possess the tough drug laws and sentencing guidelines that you, our Congress, have bestowed upon the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and other federal law enforcement agencies in our Country. That, coupled with very liberal attitudes toward drug trafficking and consumption found in many European countries, is the underpinning for disaster in Europe in the years to come.

I see Europe today teetering on the brink of a drug trafficking and abuse catastrophe similar to the one our Nation faced about 30 years ago. If you need a visual on what I predict Europe is facing in the years to come, just picture Miami, Florida in the late 1970s, followed by the 'crack' cocaine epidemic that exploded all across our Nation in the 1980s. The bottom line—Latin American and Mexican drug lords currently face far less of a threat distributing their poison in Europe than they do in the United States, and there is far more to gain in the way of profits.

Africa is the center of gravity for the drug cartel's movement of cocaine out of Latin America and Mexico to European and other markets. West Africa's geographical location, positioned between Latin America and Europe, and its weak security status, make it the ideal setting for exploitation by powerful drug cartels and terrorist organizations. These powerful cartels, just like terrorist organizations, thrive in 'permissive environments,' something our military refers to as 'ungoverned space.' In fact, the cartels invest hundreds of millions of dollars each year to destabilize regions around the world to advance their operational efficiencies. They rely heavily on the hallmarks of organized crime—corruption, intimidation and brutal violence—to destabilize governments in places like West Africa. Many countries in West Africa qualify as quintessential examples of ungoverned space, and allow powerful criminals and terrorists to work unimpeded.

Most countries in West Africa simply do not possess the judicial, border, military and intelligence institutions and infrastructure necessary to deal with the threat posed by the Latin American and Mexican drug cartels, not to mention terrorist organizations and indigenous criminal groups that operate freely throughout this region. What is the security situation really

like in some West African countries? Cops without ink pens and paper, much less radios, automobiles, guns and ammunition; border guards without uniforms, not to mention basic checkpoint facilities and contraband detection equipment; militaries often led by the toughest thugs money can buy; and intelligence service operatives who blend seamlessly in with the bad guys, because they are working directly for, or in conjunction with the bad guys.

The security ‘fabric’ of most West African countries has the same tensile strength as the worn out, filthy and flimsy Western T-shirts that cover far too many of their neglected citizens. The retail value of a few, multi-hundred kilogram loads of cocaine passing through many of these countries is equal to or exceeds their GNP. The narco-dollars being spent in support of the cartel’s efforts in West Africa threaten to destabilize their already anemic economies even more. Porous borders, and the significant challenges they present, exacerbate the overall security threat even further.

### **Strategic Security Threats That May Not Have Been Considered**

Many have written about the strategic security threats caused by drug trafficking and consumption in Africa, but I would like to address some that you most likely have not heard of or considered.

Local indigenous organized crime groups in Africa are as brutal, if not more so, than any in the world, but they have historically lacked the sophistication of global drug trafficking cartels and other transnational organized crime groups. However, they are now learning from the most advanced organized crime organizations in the world—the Latin American and Mexican drug trafficking cartels, including the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), which by the way has been designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization by our Country, the European Union and other countries. Why? Because, the cartels rely heavily on these indigenous organized crime groups for their smuggling and trafficking expertise on the African Continent; just as the Colombian cartels did with the Mexican syndicates when we successfully closed off the old Caribbean drug transportation corridor, and forced the Colombian kingpins to start moving their drug loads across our Southwest border.

Another dimension to this dangerous scenario is that indigenous organized crime groups have most likely learned from Mexican traffickers to demand payment in ‘kind’ (cocaine) for their services, rather than in cash. They can make far greater profits with cocaine in their hands than they can with currency in their coffers. This type of arrangement allows the indigenous organized crime groups to create demand—markets—in their own back yard. There is an important lesson to be learned here: no ‘transit country’ remains purely a transit country forever. Just ask our colleagues in Central America, the Caribbean and Mexico. This growing, mutually supporting and beneficial relationship is advancing the sophistication and complexity of African indigenous organized crime groups at light speed.

The state of affairs I described in the two previous paragraphs is troubling. However, seven months after I hung up my DEA badge, gun and credentials for the last time, I am still losing sleep over something that haunts me like nothing else. Terrorist organizations and global drug trafficking organizations naturally migrate to, and ultimately congregate in, the same ungoverned space. A recent CNN exclusive reported that al Qaeda was believed to be moving some of its command and control network back to Somalia where they had a significant presence through the mid-1990s. The fact of the matter is, al Qaeda never left the African Continent and they have routinely had their operatives working throughout North, East and West Africa. Hezbollah and Hamas are even more active in West Africa and other places on the Continent.

Mark my word, as we speak here today, operatives from al Qaeda, Hezbollah, and Hamas—perhaps others—are rubbing shoulders with the Latin American and Mexican drug cartels, including the FARC, in West African countries and other places on the Continent. They are frequenting the same seedy bars and sleazy brothels, and they are lodging in the same seamy hotels. And they are ‘talking business.’ They are sharing lessons learned, sharing critically important contacts and operational means and methods.

What is most troubling about this situation is that terrorist and cartel leaders send their toughest, most cunning young sergeants and lieutenants to places like West Africa; the kind of guys who they can count on to advance their (the leader’s) agendas no matter what it takes. These are the guys who will fight and claw their way into executive leadership positions within their respective organizations within the next decade—in both terrorist groups and global drug cartels. And these are the guys who are forming personal relationships today that will most assuredly evolve into strategic, organizational relationships tomorrow, as they work their way up the ladder within their respective organizations. **This scenario is the witches brew.** We as a Nation should be doing everything in our power to drive a wedge between these powerful threats, but I fear that we are not. And I am afraid we could pay dearly for our mistake in the years to come.

Finally, permissive environments like those found in some countries of West Africa are unintentionally promoting the continued evolution of what I call the ‘hybrid terrorist organization,’ which is a designated foreign terrorist organization that has involved itself in one or more aspects of the global drug trade to help fund operations and keep their respective movements alive. The Hezbollah, FARC, Hamas, Sendero Luminoso, Abu Sayef and at least 15 others of the 45 current designated foreign terrorist organizations have made this transition. It is the face of 21<sup>st</sup> Century organized crime, and places like West Africa are its preferred breeding ground and base for operations.

### **A Few Suggestions to Help Turn This Around**

It is difficult for global drug trafficking cartels to establish wholesale bases of operations in areas of the world where the rule of law is strong and security institutions are respected. In many

West African countries, as well as other challenged environments around the globe, it is important that we work closely with host-nation officials to develop and implement fully vetted judicial paradigms. Our government has been obsessed with building corruption free police institutions in some extremely challenged environments over the past few years, yet we continue to miss a critical link that is essential to the success of these projects. If trusting police officers have to deal with corrupt prosecutors, and/or corrupt judges, and/or corrupt prison officials, then the entire judicial process falls apart like a house of cards. Focus on creating a corruption free judicial process—and not just corruption free cops. Anything short of that is doomed to failure.

Equipping militaries, law enforcement and intelligence services with aircraft, swift-boats, and other costly interdiction and enforcement hardware is important, but we had better have a long-term training and mentoring piece attached to these projects. If not, we could find our counterparts in West Africa using those assets against us in support of the cartels—or terrorist organizations. I no longer speak for the DEA, but I believe the Agency would be willing to assume greater responsibility for enhancing our Nation's counter-narcotics strategy in Africa if it received the additional personnel and resources that it desperately needs to address the threats I have discussed today. Included should be funding for the DEA to stand-up additional offices in Africa, as well as fully vetted host-nation Sensitive Investigative Units in several African countries, much like the Agency has in Colombia, Mexico, Afghanistan and elsewhere. The DEA could then share the most sensitive intelligence with their African counterparts for effective action.

Many Department of Defense detection and monitoring (D&M) resources, as well as maritime interdiction resources, were moved out of Southern Command's area of responsibility after the 9/11 attacks on our Nation, and these resources have never been fully recouped. These assets are responsible for identifying and interdicting drug loads moving by sea and air. Although Joint Interagency Task Force South (JIATF-S) interdiction seizures have been nothing short of spectacular over the past few years, it is in large part due to our military working closer with federal law enforcement in the post 9/11 era. Needless to say, if Southern Command recovered those missing D&M and interdiction resources, the seizure numbers would be even greater, including the interdiction of drug loads destined for Europe via Africa.

Finally, it would be easy to say that Africa is Europe's problem, but the truth of the matter is that the money which flows back into the coffers of the Latin American and Mexican drug cartels, *the same ones that are directly impacting our country*, makes the cartels even stronger. We as a Nation should be doing a great deal more to support Africa, but I also strongly believe we should press many European countries to do more in support of counter-narcotics efforts designed to dismantle or significantly disrupt the Latin American and Mexican drug cartels. The United States has funded the global, counter-narcotics ticket for far too long, and it is time other responsible nations assumed more responsibility of this burden.

## **‘Out of Africa’**

If I had one over-arching theme to sum up my comments today it would be, ‘Out of Africa.’ We cannot modify that wildly famous Las Vegas slogan, ‘What goes on in Vegas stays in Vegas’ and apply it to Africa. Because what goes on in Africa does not stay in Africa; whether it is drugs, terrorism, the black diamond trade, human trafficking or some other transnational organized criminal activity, the end result impacts distant shores.

I mentioned that I lose sleep at night thinking about the escalating involvement of Hezbollah, Hamas and other terrorist groups in the global drug trade. They are operating freely in many parts of Latin America and that is troubling indeed. However, in my mind the threat is far more dangerous than most choose to admit, because these same terrorist groups and others are now clearly positioned on our Eastern ‘flank’—West Africa—and the drug trade emanating in Latin America is clearly funding, and now *facilitating* much of their operational capacity.

What goes on in Africa does not stay in Africa.