

**Statement for the Record**

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**By**

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**Regarding**

**‘U.S. Counternarcotics Strategy in Afghanistan’**

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Chairman Feinstein, Co-Chairman Grassley, and Distinguished Members of the Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the threat posed by drug trafficking and related security issues in Afghanistan. The security challenges facing Afghanistan today, above and beyond drug trafficking and abuse are enormous. I believe you will agree with me that the Taliban is at the root of most of those security threats, and I believe it will be abundantly clear by the end of this hearing that most of the security threats emanating from the Afghan drug trade now fall squarely in the lap of the same malevolent thugs—the Taliban. What is even more ominous are the broader strategic threats, the by-product if you will, this activity has, and will continue to produce.

Madam Chairman let me say up front that each of you on this Caucus, 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.

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 Afghanistan. You will receive a career, Federal narcotic agent's perspective on the Afghan drug trade, and how the trade will continue to destabilize the country if we do not become more aggressively involved in countering this major threat. If left unchecked, funding from the Afghan drug trade will continue to fill the Taliban's war chest in volumes unmatched by all other forms of illicit finance combined. I will also provide you with my views on the continued evolution of the Taliban—from an insurgent group, to a designated terrorist organization, to a 'hybrid terrorist organization.'

### **The Continued Evolution of the Taliban, And 21<sup>st</sup> Century Global Organized Crime**

The Taliban is following in the footsteps of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and at least 20 other terrorist groups designated by our nation, into a 'hybrid terrorist organization.' The Taliban was merely an insurgent group just a few short years ago, but they are now clearly one part designated terrorist organization—and one part global drug trafficking cartel.

Just like the FARC, the Taliban got its start in the global drug trade by simply taxing poor farmers, which is one of the world's oldest forms of organized criminal extortion. They then

began taxing the movement of drugs and precursor chemicals within Afghanistan, and across its borders. Like the FARC, the Taliban formed ever-closer relations with traditional traffickers as they grew more accustomed and comfortable with each other, and the Taliban eventually started providing security at the traditional traffickers' clandestine laboratories and cache sites. In the private sector, it is called 'outsourcing.'

About three years ago, the National Security Council asked the DEA to conduct a comparative analysis of the FARC and Taliban with respect to their evolution in the global drug trade. What the Agency reported as I recall, was that the Taliban was on the exact same path as the FARC, but the Taliban was seven to ten years behind the FARC's evolutionary development in the global drug trade. What troubles me most about the study are not its findings; but the speed with which the Taliban is advancing their commitment and involvement in drug trafficking activity. They are closing the seven to ten year 'evolutionary gap' with the FARC at a speed far faster than most care to admit or acknowledge.

The DEA reestablished its presence in Afghanistan in early 2003, after being forced from the country by the Soviet Union's invasion in 1979. By 2005, the DEA clearly identified the Taliban's involvement in protecting clandestine laboratory and drug cache sites for traditional traffickers. Flash forward just four short years. The Agency has unmistakably determined that the Taliban is now managing and operating major clandestine laboratories, drug cache sites, and poppy bazaars. They have morphed; they have become the manufactures and traffickers of heroin, opium, hashish and marijuana.

As an example, just two weeks ago the Counter Narcotics Police of Afghanistan and Afghan Army Commandos, supported by the DEA and U.S. military Special Forces, raided a major laboratory in Southern Afghanistan and seized approximately 1.8 metric tons of opium and heroin—a major haul by anyone's calculations. It doesn't stop there. Sixteen Taliban were killed at the site, and the evidence clearly reveals the group was involved in the manufacture of heroin.

What is even more troubling is the fact that Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) and IED bomb making materials were recovered at the scene, along with a host of other weapons and Taliban propaganda and training manuals. Thanks to strong support from our military, raids like this are now taking place weekly. IEDs and IED bomb making materials, suicide vests, rocket-propelled grenade launchers, other weapons, as well as Taliban propaganda and training manuals, are routinely located at these sites. Nearly all of those labs, cache sites and opium bazaars are directly linked to the DEA's High Value Targets (HVTs) in Afghanistan, and they provide a treasure trove of evidence that support future prosecutions.

The DEA is usually focused on building prosecutable cases against 15 to 20 HVTs in Afghanistan. These are the 'most wanted' drug traffickers in the country and most, if not all, are members of the Taliban. Those who aren't Taliban are closely linked to the Taliban. I am proud of the men and women of the DEA for their work with Afghan counterparts in bringing several of the most notorious Afghan traffickers to justice in the United States. Traffickers like Haji Bashir Noorzai, who was the world's single largest heroin trafficker before being arrested by the DEA in an elaborately complex undercover sting operation. He was also one of the five original

founding members of the Taliban Ruling Shura in Kabul, and was on Central Command's 'Top 10' HVT list when we invaded Afghanistan and initially ousted the Taliban in 2002. Noorzai got a taste of American justice in the Southern District of New York, and is now serving a life sentence with no hope of parole. The DEA could not have successfully brought Noorzai or any of the other Afghan HVTs to justice without the powerful extraterritorial jurisdictions that you bestowed on the Agency when you passed legislation enacting the Title 21, 959 and 960(a) statutes. From a retired federal narcotics agent—thank you.

The money generated by the Afghan opium and heroin trade is staggering, and most experts usually fail to consider how much money the Taliban derives from the hashish trade. In June 2008, the Counternarcotics Police of Afghanistan and Afghan Army Commandos, supported by the DEA and U.S. military Special Forces, raided a Taliban hashish processing facility near Spin Boldak in Southern Afghanistan where they seized 235 metric tons of the drug—by far the largest drug seizure in world history. The estimated Western European value of the drugs was over \$600 million dollars. If the Taliban's profit was just 5 percent, which is being overly conservative, they stood to gain \$30 million dollars from the stash. Around the same time, the DEA and Afghan counterparts raided a HVT's compound in Eastern Afghanistan and seized his drug ledgers, which clearly showed that \$169 million dollars had moved through the traffickers hands for the sale of 81 metric tons of heroin over just a 10-month period. He is unequivocally affiliated with the Taliban, and is facing American justice.

One important aspect of the Taliban's involvement in the drug trade that I believe we are failing to exploit is their leadership's growing level of greed. The Taliban's 'corporate office' has acquired an insatiable appetite for easy money over the past few years. Just like the FARC, the Taliban leadership uses ideology as an effective means by which to recruit and indoctrinate the young warriors they rely on to do their dirty work, as well as the nasty fighting. However, the Taliban leadership's core beliefs are going right out the window as greed replaces ideology as their principle motivator.

As we witness the continued evolution of the Taliban, we must also recognize we are witnessing the evolution of 21<sup>st</sup> Century global organized crime. It is becoming more and more difficult to distinguish the terrorist from the cartel member, because they are operationally and organizationally interbreeding and morphing into one and the same. The indisputable convergence of terrorism and international drug trafficking is playing out before our very eyes in Afghanistan, and in many other places around the globe.

### **U.S. Military Support to Law Enforcement An Important Aspect of the Afghan Counter Insurgency**

Our military has conclusively realized over the past couple years that we will not win in Afghanistan until we get the country's drug trade in check, and law enforcement cannot effectively conduct counter-narcotics operations without the support of our military. What was unsympathetically absent a few short years ago is now generously available—robust military support to counter-narcotics interdiction operations. The types of interdiction operations I mentioned earlier are now supported in myriad ways by our military and all are jointly planned, coordinated, de-conflicted and executed by military and law enforcement personnel.

In support of drug enforcement operations, our military routinely provides airborne medical evacuation capability, and they dedicate heavily armed close air support and Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) aerial platforms to provide airborne force protection. They have purchased specialized field equipment for DEA and Afghan officers, such as night vision goggles, and they have purchased MI-17 heavy lift helicopters for dedicated vertical lift of agents and their equipment. Our military has purchased and issued to DEA portable Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) for dedicated use on drug enforcement operations. They provide critically important encrypted communications equipment, and have purchased very costly telecommunications intercept equipment that Afghan police and DEA agents use to judicially tap traffickers communication devices. They have invested in ISR technology for DEA aircraft, and have built training academies and other facilities to support Afghan and DEA personnel. Moreover, our military has paid for virtually all aspects of the Interagency Operations Coordination Center, and the Afghan Threat Finance Cell, which is helping to identify and track the funds derived from the Afghanistan drug trade. Most important—almost all operations are now executed with U.S. Military Special Forces operators working shoulder-to-shoulder with law enforcement agents.

When you fuse the unparalleled tradecraft that seasoned DEA agents bring to the fight with the exclusive war fighting techniques of highly experienced Special Forces operators, you create a counter-insurgency capability that is second-to-none. More of this blend would definitely be better, and would be a wise investment of taxpayer dollars.

### **The Bottom Line**

We are not going to win the fight in Afghanistan until we get the country's drug production and trafficking activity in check, because it provides a limitless stream of funding directly into the Taliban's war chest.

Professor James Fearon of Stanford University completed a study in 2002 entitled, "Why Some Wars Last Longer than Others." The professor identified and studied 128 civil wars and insurgencies from 1945 to 2000, and found that on average they lasted about eight years. However, he identified and isolated 17 of the 128 that lasted on average about five times longer than the other 111—40 years or longer. The common thread between the 17 was that the anti-government forces involved in the conflicts generated their own contraband revenue, most of which was through their involvement in one or more aspects of the global drug trade.

Finally, the Taliban and traditional drug traffickers both thrive in what our military calls 'ungoverned space.' In Afghanistan, they share a truly symbiotic relationship. When traditional drug traffickers successfully destabilize government by corrupting officials—the Taliban benefits. When the Taliban successfully destabilizes government through attacks on government forces or by intimidating the populace—the drug traffickers benefit. They are both constantly working to destabilize government and create permissive environments in which to operate, because they flourish in areas of weak governance. Consequently, if you fight one with any less passion and vigor than you fight the other, you are most likely doomed to fail.