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## Drug Intelligence Brief

### DRUGS AND TERRORISM: A NEW PERSPECTIVE

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#### Introduction

Prior to September 11, 2001, drug trafficking and terrorist activities were usually addressed by the law enforcement community as separate issues. In the wake of the terrorist attacks in New York City, Washington, DC, and Pennsylvania, the public now perceives these two criminal activities as intertwined. For the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), investigating the link between drugs and terrorism has taken on renewed importance.

Throughout history, various aspects of the criminal world have been linked together, such as drug traffickers with connections to illegal gambling, prostitution, and arms dealing. Perhaps the most recognizable illustration of this linkage is the expansion of the Italian Mafia in the United States during the early 20th century. The links between various aspects of the criminal world are evident because those who use illicit activities to further or fund their lifestyle, cause, or well-being often interact with others involved in various illicit activities. For example, organizations that launder money for drug traffickers also launder money for arms

traffickers, terrorists, etc. The link between drugs and terrorism is not a new phenomenon.

Globalization has made the world a smaller place, changing the face of both legitimate and illegitimate enterprise. Criminals, by exploiting advances in technology, finance, communications, and transportation in pursuit of their illegal endeavors, have become criminal entrepreneurs. Perhaps the most alarming aspect of this “entrepreneurial” style of crime is the intricate manner in which drugs and terrorism may be intermingled. Since September 11th, the public’s image of terrorism is magnified. Not only is the proliferation of illegal drugs perceived as a danger, but also the proceeds from drugs are among the sources for funding for other criminal activities, including terrorism.

### Narco-Terrorism

The nexus between drugs and violence is not new; in fact, it is as old as drug abuse itself. The mind-altering strength of drugs has always had the power to create violence, but there is another kind of connection between drugs and violence—the use of drug trafficking to fund the violence perpetrated by terrorist groups.<sup>1</sup>

Within the context of current world events, narco-terrorism is difficult to define. Historically, DEA has defined narco-terrorism in terms of Pablo Escobar, the classic cocaine trafficker who used terrorist tactics against noncombatants to further his political agenda and to protect his drug trade. Today, however, governments find themselves faced with classic terrorist groups that participate in, or otherwise receive funds from, drug trafficking to further their agenda. In this respect, are narco-terrorists actual drug traffickers who use terrorism against civilians to advance their agenda? Or are narco-terrorists first and foremost terrorists who happen to use drug money to further their cause? Perhaps, the correct answer is that narco-terrorism may apply in both situations.

DEA defines a narco-terrorist organization as “an organized group that is complicit in the activities of drug trafficking in order to further, or fund, premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets with the intention to influence (that is, influence a government or group of people).”

### The Pablo Escobar Example



One of the most infamous “narco-terrorists” was Pablo Escobar. As leader of the Medellin cocaine cartel in Colombia, he became one of the wealthiest and most feared men in the world. At the height of his success, Escobar was listed in Forbes Magazine among the world’s wealthiest men. While on the surface, he was nothing more than a street thug who became successful by trafficking in cocaine, Escobar had political aspirations and strove to project the appearance of legitimacy, claiming his wealth was the result of real estate investments. He eventually ran for Congress and campaigned for foreign policy changes that would prohibit the

extradition of Colombian citizens to the United States.

Escobar had a penchant for violence. He wreaked havoc on Colombia while attempting to persuade the government to change its extradition policy. Due to the numerous assassinations of politicians, presidential candidates, Supreme Court justices, police officers, and civilians, as well as a number of bombings culminating in the bombing of an Avianca commercial airliner in 1989, Escobar enraged both Colombia and the world. These actions resulted in a massive manhunt and his death in 1993.

Escobar was a drug trafficker who used drug-related violence and terrorism to further his own political, personal, and financial goals. Moreover, he funded his terrorist activities with the money obtained from his drug trafficking endeavors. He was the classic narco-terrorist; his cause was simply himself.

Terrorist organizations use a number of sources to garner funds for their activities, such as petty crimes, kidnap-for-ransom, charities, sympathizers, front companies, and drug trafficking. Most of the known terrorist organizations use several of these methods to collect funding, while preferring particular methods to others. Drug trafficking is among the most profitable sources.

According to the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), Americans alone spend an estimated \$64 billion on illegal drugs annually.

Drug trafficking has always been a profitable means for criminal organizations to further or fund their activities. The complicity of terrorist groups in drug trafficking varies from group to group and region to region. In the broadest sense, some terrorist groups may be involved in all aspects of the drug trade, from cultivation, production, transportation, and wholesale distribution to money laundering. These groups may also provide security for drug traffickers transporting their product through territory controlled by terrorist organizations or their supporters. Finally, in some cases, terrorist groups or their supporters may require a "tax" to be paid on illicit products, or passage through controlled territory. No matter which form it takes, or the level of involvement in drug trafficking, many terrorist groups are using drug money to fund their activities and perpetrate violence against governments and people around the world.

### Afghanistan Under the Taliban



As in the case of formerly Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, narco-terrorism was not limited to terrorist organizations. Afghanistan is a major source country for the cultivation, processing, and trafficking of opiates, producing over 70 percent of the world's supply of illicit opium in 2000. Because of the country's decimation by decades of warfare, illicit drugs have become a major source of income. The Taliban's Afghanistan would be an example of a state primarily funded by illicit opium production. Through this drug income, the Taliban were able to support and protect Osama bin Laden and the al Qaeda organization. As in this case, drugs and terrorism frequently share a common ground of geography, money, and violence.

### Narco-Terrorism Versus Drug-Related Violence

When looking at the connection between drugs and violence, it is important to differentiate between drug-related violence and narco-terrorism. By definition, terrorism is premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets. With drug-related violence, we see financially motivated violence perpetrated against those who interfere with or cross the path of a drug trafficking organization. While we see drug-related violence on a daily basis on the streets of major cities, narco-terrorism is, in many cases, less visible. Drug-related violence permeates society at all levels and is visible at every stage of the drug trade, from domestic violence to turf warfare between rival drug trafficking gangs or groups.<sup>2</sup> With narco-terrorism, the acts of terror are clearly evident, but the funding source is often well-disguised.

### Evolution of Narco-Terrorism

Any region, in which illegal drugs are cultivated, transported, distributed, or consumed, is susceptible to narco-terrorism. Throughout the world, insurgent groups, revolutionary groups, and ideological or spiritual groups, who use violence to promote their political mission may use drug proceeds to fund acts of terror in furtherance of their ideology. Leadership, cultural, political, and economic change may affect the ideology or mission of a group. Internal divisions and splinter groups may result, each seeking to pursue their goals via different avenues, be they legitimate political activity, perpetuation of violence, or criminal activity, such as drug trafficking.



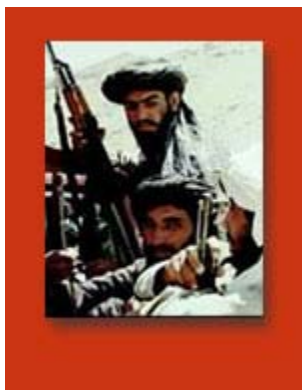
History has shown that narco-terrorist organizations fall into different categories. One category includes politically motivated groups that use drug proceeds to support their terrorist activities; activities that will confer legitimacy upon them within the state. These groups usually call for a ceasefire with the government or take measures to establish a legal political party whereby their political goals are realized through nonviolent, legal means. Groups that fall into this category are generally viewed with skepticism by the state. An example of a group in this category is the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK).



Another category consists of groups that continually pursue their ideological goals while participating in aspects of the drug trade; for example, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia or FARC).

There are notable examples of narco-terrorist groups in almost every corner of the world. Many insurgent and extremist groups are suspected of drug trafficking involvement, such as Hezbollah and the Islamic Resistance Movement (HAMAS) in the tri-border region of Paraguay, Argentina, and Brazil; Sendero Luminoso (the Shining Path) in Peru; and the Basque Fatherland and Liberty (ETA) in Spain. The level of involvement in drug trafficking by actual narco-terrorist groups and the evolution of the groups and their purposes are often very different.

### **Kurdistan Worker's Party**



The PKK in Turkey was founded in 1974. Developed as a revolutionary socialist organization, the goal of the PKK is to establish an independent nation of Kurdistan. In 1984, the PKK began to use violence against Turkish security forces, gradually escalating the level of violence to include civilians. In the early 1990s, the group added urban terrorism to their repertoire of violent activities.

The PKK, considered a terrorist organization by most Western Governments, is represented in Kurdish immigrant communities throughout the world and is particularly prevalent in Europe.

The PKK is known to benefit from drug trafficking, but the extent of their involvement is often debated. The Government of Turkey consistently reports that the PKK, as an organization, is responsible for much of the illicit drug processing and trafficking in Turkey. Turkish press reports state that the PKK produces 60 tons of heroin per year and receives an estimated income of US\$40 million each year from drug trafficking proceeds. According to historic DEA reporting, the PKK may receive funding from a number of illicit means, including kidnap-for-ransom and drugs.

Reporting from the early 1990s indicated that several large drug trafficking families were supporters or sympathizers of the PKK, and that direct funds from their trafficking organizations were provided to the PKK to buy supplies. However, recent changes in the structure of the organization, due in part to the group's founder declaring a peace initiative in 1999, have led elements of the PKK to strive for legitimacy and possible involvement in Turkey's political process.

### **Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia**



The FARC is one of Colombia's major insurgent groups. The FARC is a pro-Communist group that wants to replace the current Colombian Government with a leftist, anti-U.S. regime. The FARC emerged in 1964 as the military wing of the Colombian Communist Party, with the goal of overthrowing the government and the ruling class of Colombia. The FARC is the largest, best-trained and equipped, and most effective insurgent group in Colombia. Over the past two decades, the FARC has controlled large areas of

Colombia's eastern lowlands and rain forest, which are the primary coca cultivation and cocaine processing regions in the country.

The FARC is an economically self-sufficient organization, supporting its mission through kidnappings, extortion, bank robberies, and the drug trade. Some FARC fronts are promoting coca cultivation, managing cocaine processing, selling drugs for cash, and negotiating arms deals with international drug trafficking organizations to support their broad based weapons procurement program.

Recent DEA reporting indicates that some FARC units in southern Colombia are directly involved in drug trafficking activities, including controlling local cocaine base markets and selling cocaine to international smuggling organizations. At least one FARC front—the 16th Front—has served as a cocaine source of supply for one international drug trafficking organization.

In March 2002, the United States announced its indictment of several FARC members. This case marks the first time that members of a known terrorist organization have been indicted in the United States for their drug trafficking activities, including selling cocaine in exchange for currency, weapons, and equipment.

Despite the differences between the PKK and the FARC, both were initially motivated to take action in furtherance of their ideological goals—the desire for independent homelands or political thought. The drug trade and terrorist activities were the means through which these groups furthered their missions. Changes in leadership, politics, and economics affected the varying outcomes; that is, movement toward political legitimacy for the PKK, and pursuit of an ideological mission through engagement in the drug trade by the FARC.

### **International Efforts Against Narco-Terrorism**

There are three crucial elements to attacking narco-terrorism: law enforcement efforts, intelligence gathering, and international cooperation. Many terrorist groups rarely act within the borders of one state, but tend to have a more global view in regard to their activities and fundraising. This means that combating narco-terrorism requires a global network of law enforcement and intelligence officials tackling this issue wherever it appears. It is the cooperation at all levels of law enforcement and intelligence organizations that will prevent atrocities such as those financed by drug money in South America, Southwest Asia, and the rest of the world.

Several international measures have been taken over the years to combat terrorism. According to the U.S. Department of State, there are 12 major multilateral conventions and protocols on combating terrorism.<sup>3</sup> International efforts to combat narco-terrorism are focusing on asset seizure and control of all funding sources used by terrorist organizations. In 1999, the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism was adopted. It required signatories “to take steps to prevent and counteract the financing of terrorists, whether directly or indirectly, through groups claiming to have charitable, social or cultural goals or which also engage in such illicit activities as drug trafficking or gun running.” Under this convention, signatories also were required to hold those who finance terrorism to be criminally, civilly, or administratively responsible for their acts.

In response to the incidents of September 11, 2001, the international community is expanding their efforts to control and extinguish financing that supports terrorism. On September 28, 2001, the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted an anti-terrorism resolution that called for the suppression of terrorist group financing, and improved international cooperation against terrorists. The resolution, identified as Resolution 1373 (2001), requires all states to prevent and abolish the financing of terrorism, and to criminalize the willful collection and distribution of funds for such acts. Furthermore, the resolution created a committee to monitor the implementation of the guidelines set forth in this resolution. The Security Council noted, “the close connection between international terrorism and transnational organized crime, illicit drugs, money-laundering, illegal arms-trafficking, and illegal movement of nuclear, chemical, biological and other potentially deadly materials, emphasizes the need to enhance coordination of efforts on national, sub-regional, regional and international levels to strengthen a global response to this serious challenge and threat to international security.”

### **Conclusion**

The events of September 11th brought new focus to an old problem, narco-terrorism. These events have forever changed the world and demonstrate the vulnerability to acts of terrorism of even the most powerful nation. In attempting to combat this threat, the link between drugs and terrorism came to the fore. Whether it is a state, such as formerly Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, or a narco-terrorist organization, such as the FARC, the nexus between drugs and terrorism is evident.

Nations throughout the world are aligning to combat this scourge on international society. The War on Terror and the War on Drugs are linked, with agencies throughout the United States and internationally working together as a force-multiplier in an effort to dismantle narco-terrorist organizations. Efforts to stop the funding of these groups have focused on drugs and the drug money used to perpetuate violence throughout the world. International cooperative efforts between law enforcement authorities and intelligence organizations is crucial to eliminating terrorist funding, reducing the drug flow, and preventing another September

11th.

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<sup>1</sup> According to Chapter 22 of the U.S. Code (USC), terrorism is the premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by sub-national groups or clandestine agents. International terrorism involves citizens, or territory, of more than one country. A terrorist group is any group practicing, or that has significant sub-groups that practice, international terrorism.

<sup>2</sup> According to the DEA Briefing Book, "one-quarter to one-half of all incidents of domestic violence are drug related".

<sup>3</sup> According to the U.S. Department of State, the United States is party to all 12 conventions and protocols.

<p>This report was prepared by the DEA Intelligence Division, International Strategic Support Section, Europe/Asia/Africa Unit. This report reflects information received prior to June 2002. Comments and requests for copies are welcome and may be faxed to the Intelligence Production Unit, Intelligence Division, DEA Headquarters, at (202) 307-8726.</p>
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