Gov. Chris Christie | Lt. Gov. Kim Guadagno | Dir. Chris Rodriguez

NJOHSP
Intelligence Note

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DEA: Hizballah Drug Trafficking and Money Laundering Arrests

In January, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), along with its European counterparts, arrested members of Hizballah's External Security Organization Business Affairs Component in Europe for drug trafficking and money laundering, the proceeds of which transited through Lebanon to support Hizballah operations in Syria. The DEA operation, known as Project Cassandra, involved law enforcement agencies from seven countries and targeted Hizballah's cocaine trafficking in the United States and Europe.

- Hizballah developed business relationships with South American drug cartels supplying cocaine to the US and European markets. According to the DEA, Hizballah laundered the drug revenue through the acquisition and sale of high-valued vehicles, sometimes concealing money inside vehicles shipped internationally.

Since 2011, Hizballah has been involved in the Syrian civil war in support of the Bashar al-Assad regime. In 2013, Hizballah's involvement in the Syrian conflict shifted from an advisory to a combat role. The group's commitment is demonstrated by the number of personnel it has dispatched to Syria, which Western media estimate to be 6,000 to 8,000 fighters, approximately one-quarter of its fighting force.

- In February 2015, European authorities launched an investigation based on DEA leads and discovered a network of couriers collecting and transporting drug proceeds—in the form of *euros*—from Europe to the Middle East. The revenue was then transferred to Colombian cartels using the *hawala* disbursement system, a payment network based on trust and the use of family and regional connections.

- US agencies participating in Project Cassandra include the Newark DEA office, US Customs and Border Protection, the US Treasury's Financial Crimes Enforcement Network, and the US Treasury Office of Foreign Assets Control. Officials did not specify the number of individuals arrested nor the location of arrests in Europe. The investigation is ongoing.

Contact Information

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