

State can't halt border smuggling, terrorism, congressional panel told

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SIERRA VISTA — A congressional subcommittee heard concerns yesterday from representatives of Southern Arizona's cities and counties about increased drug traffic and possible cross-border terrorism.

Counties and cities do not have the resources to cope with the influx of illegal drugs crossing the border, said Cochise County Attorney Alan Polley, testifying before Sen. Dennis DeConcini, D-Ariz., and two other members of a joint oversight subcommittee on drug interdiction.

Cross-border drug traffic and the newly raised threat of terrorists entering the United States from Mexico "should be addressed by federal personnel," said Polley, speaking for the attorneys of Yuma, Santa Cruz and Pima counties.

Drug traffic in the Southwest is increasing, Polley told DeConcini, Sen. James Abdnor, R-S.D., and Rep. Glenn English, D-Okla., at the hearing held in the Sierra Vista City Hall.

Polley said more effective drug enforcement on the East Coast since 1980 has forced smugglers back to the Southwest. The frequency and size of illegal shipments through this area, he said, is approaching the volume of the early 1970s, when traffic here peaked.

Nogales, Ariz., Mayor Marcelino Varona Jr., speaking for his city, Patagonia, San Luis, Tucson, South Tucson and Yuma, attributed the increase in drug traffic to Mexico's financial problems.

Varona, saying his city and others are easy targets for smugglers and potential terrorists, called on federal agencies to coordinate their preventive efforts.

"Everybody's running into each other in Nogales," he said, "and not getting anything done."

Sierra Vista Mayor Jean Randle, representing Cochise County cities, said she would like to see increased involvement by the military in halting drug traffic. She also called for stiffer sentences for drug users.

On terrorism, Randle said the federal government should coordinate efforts with local authorities. There is no system or central contact point for cities if terrorism occurs, she said.

But an FBI official, testifying at the same hearing, said the bureau sees no major threat of terrorism along the U.S.-Mexican border.

"The FBI does not perceive that a major problem of transnational terrorism exists along the U.S.-Mexican border," said Floyd I. Clarke, assistant FBI director for criminal investigation. He attributed the absence of the threat to cooperative efforts by U.S. and Mexican authorities.

But, he said, links exist between terrorist and drug-smuggling organizations, particularly in South America.

The three congressmen, in separate statements, called on the Reagan administration to increase expenditures for the war on drugs.

The president, they said, has called illegal drugs the nation's most serious threat, but has not backed those words with financial support for the agencies involved.